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THE WINGS OF ICARUS

THE

WINGS OF ICARUS

BEING

THE LIFE OF ONE EMILIA FLETCHER

AS REVEALED BY HERSELF IN

I. THIRTY-FIVE LETTERS
WRITTEN TO CONSTANCE NORRIS BETWEEN JULY 18TH, 188–, AND MARCH 26TH OF THE FOLLOWING YEAR

II. A FRAGMENTARY JOURNAL

III. A POSTSCRIPT

BY

LAURENCE ALMA TADEMA

New York
MACMILLAN AND COMPANY
AND LONDON
1894

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THE LETTERS.

THE WINGS OF ICARUS.

LETTER I.

FLETCHER'S HALL, GRAYSMILL,
July 18th.

Dear and Beloved Constance, — What shall I say to you? Here I sit, in a strange room, in a strange land, — and my life lies behind me. It is close upon midnight, and very dark. I can see nothing out of window. The air is hot and heavy, the moths flutter round my candle; I cannot save them all. I am trying to write you a letter — do you understand? Oh, but I have no thoughts, only visions! Three there are that rise before me, sometimes separately, sometimes all together.

I see you, Mrs. Norris. We are standing on the platform, side by side; people

push past us, shouting, running, but I see only you. Your hat fell back just now as you stood on tip-toe to kiss me, and the pale brown curls with their golden threads shine in the lamplight; your eyes are open very wide, they are very blue, and tears cover your cheeks. I feel your arms round my neck as I clasp you to me.

The vision fades, and another rises: an open grave in the Campo Santo. The sun falls upon it, — why should the sun shine? I wait until the rest are gone, then I peer down into the earthy hole, saying to myself, "There my mother lies — that is my mother." And when I turn to go, I see a group of little children; they have come, perhaps, to smell the flowers. Why were they born, those little children?

Then, the third vision: a man's back going out of a door. I seldom see his face now, only his back as he left me that evening. He never looked behind, al-

though I wrote "I love you" with my eyes upon his shoulders; and next day the letter came.

As dark as the land lies out of the window there, so dark lie the days before me. I am unutterably lonely. I had three; but they are gone from me, taken by death, distance, and infidelity. And as I sit here in ignorance of the to-be, knowing only what has been, and what is gone for ever, I cannot make myself believe that I have not seen my day and my day's end. Yet to-morrow morning, when I awake and look out of window, I shall see trees and meadows, — hills, perhaps, beneath the sky. Who knows but what, if I live my day through bravely and with patience, some light may break again upon my heart?

July 19.

Good morning, dearest. It is half-past six and a sunny morning; I have been

leaning out of window in my night-gown, watching the mists rise in the valley. The air is very sweet here in England; I see oceans of trees, great stretches of heath and meadow. Surely, surely one ought to be happy in this beautiful world! I shall dress quickly and go out. This letter, such as it is, shall go to you by the first post, and to-night I shall write again, when I myself know something of my surroundings. Good-bye then for the present, my best and dearest.

EMILIA.

Letter II.

July 19.

It is just half-past ten, my Constance; the two old ladies have gone to bed. I am getting on very well, on the whole, although I had the misfortune to keep them waiting three-quarters of an hour for breakfast this morning. It was so beautiful out of doors, and I was so happy roaming in field and wood,— happy with the happiness sunshine can lay atop of the greatest sorrow,— that I stayed out till nearly ten o'clock. I had taken some milk and bread in the kitchen before starting, not realising that breakfast here is a solemn meal. Poor old souls! they were too polite to begin without me, and I found them positively drooping with hunger.

All the rancour that I had harboured in my heart this many a year against my father's stepmother has vanished into thin air. One glance at the old lady's delicate weak face, at her diffident eyes and nervous fingers, dispelled once and forever any preconceived idea that she might have helped him in his ardent difficult boyhood, stood between him and his father in his day of disgrace. Had she been a woman of mettle, I could never have forgiven her the neutral part she played; but she stands there cleared by her very impotence.

I think she was nervous of meeting me, last night; she said something confused about my poor papa, about her husband's severity, adding that she was sorry not to have known my mamma, but supposed I must be like her, as I looked quite the foreigner with my black eyes. Her whole manner towards me is almost painful in

its humility; this morning she begged me to let her live with me, and die in this house, saying she did not care to go and live with her son; upon which I of course assured her that she must still consider everything her own, and the scene ended in kisses and a pocket-handkerchief.

There is something very touching about an old woman's hand; I felt myself much more moved than the occasion warranted when she held me with her trembling fingers, moving them nervously up and down, so that I felt the small weak bones under the skin, all soft, full-veined, and wrinkled.

Her sister, Caroline Seymour, is younger, probably not more than sixty, and very active. She has a bright, bird-like face, over which flits from time to time a sad little gleam of lost beauty. Her fingers are always busy, and the beads in her cap bob up and down inces-

santly as she bends over her fancy-work. Poor old souls — poor old children! I think my grandfather must have led them a life; there is a peacefulness upon them that suggests deliverance. He has been dead just five weeks.

But the old house will see quiet days enough now. I have wandered all over it, and find it a beautiful place in itself, although it is so stuffed with wool-work, vile china, gildings, wax flowers, and indescribable mantel-piece atrocities, that there is not a simple or restful corner anywhere. Yet I find myself touched by its very hideousness, when I think that it probably looked even so, smelt even so stale and sweet, in the days of my dear father's boyhood. There is a picture in the large drawing-room that gives me infinite pleasure. It is a portrait of my own grandmother with papa in a white frock on her knees, and my

poor Aunt Fanny beside her, a neat little smiling girl in pink, with very long drawers. There is something in the young mother's face that, at first sight, made my father's smile rise clearly to my memory. I have since tried to recall the vision, but in vain.

My father's half-brother, George Fletcher, a widower with a large family, who lives four miles from here, came to see me this afternoon, and I took a great dislike to him. (Did I hear you say "Of course"?) But really, dearest, these introductions are very painful; it is most unpleasant to have the undesirable stranger thrust upon one in the guise of friend and protector, to find oneself standing on a footing of inevitable familiarity with people whose hands one had rather not touch. He kissed me, Constantia, but he certainly will not do so again. Fortunately, I like my two old ladies; things might be worse.

To-morrow my lawyer comes from London to speak to me on business. I shall be glad when the interview is over, for I understand nothing at all about business matters. I can indeed barely grasp the fact that I have come into possession of land and money. Heaven only knows what I am to do with it all.

Write to me; write soon. You seem further away from me to-day than you did last night; and yet I should miss you more if I could realise my own existence. Can you make your way through these contradictions? It seems to me this evening that I, Emilia, am still beside you, that some one else sits here in exile with nothing written on the page of her future, not even by the finger of Hope. Good night, dearest.

Yours ever and always,

EMILIA.

Letter III.

Fletcher's Hall, Graysmill,
July 26th.

What do you think stepped in with my bath this morning? A long narrow letter sealed with a heart. I kissed the blue stamp and spread the three dear sheets out on my pillow. Oimé, Constantia, how I love you! But why write about *me?* Why waste pen and ink wondering how I am? Tell me about yourself, tell me all you do, and all you think; tell me how many different hats you wore on Wednesday, and how you misspent your time on Thursday; tell me of all the nonsense that is poured into your ears, of all the rubbish you read; tell me even how many times your mother wakes you in the

night to ask if you are sleeping well. I long for you so that the very faults of your life are dear to me, even those for which I most reprove you when you are near.

Let me see: it is past midday with you; you and your mother are out walking. I hear you both.

"Constance," says Mrs. Rayner, "put up your parasol!"

"Thanks, mother," you reply; "I like to feel the sun."

"You'll freckle."

"Through this thick veil and all the powder?"

"You'll freckle, I tell you. Put up your parasol."

"Oh, mother, do let me be!"

Here Mrs. Rayner wrenches the parasol out of your hands and puts it up with a jerk; you take it, heaving a very loud sigh, upon which your mother seizes it again and pops it down.

"Very well, be as freckled as you please; what does it matter to me, after all? It's so pretty to have freckles, isn't it? Please yourself! Only I warn you that you'll look like a fig before the year's out!"

Oh, dear me, it seems I'm in good spirits to-day! Why not, with your letter in my pocket? I am sitting out of doors in the woods. I love this place, apart from its own beauty; I like to think of my father out here in the open, dreaming his young dreams. Indoors in the old house I am often miserable, with a misery beyond my own, remembering how he suffered once between those walls.

No, I am not really in good spirits, although there comes now and again a little gust of light-heartedness. You know me. For the rest, I hate myself, I am a worm. The empire of myself is lost; I am sitting low on the ground, where my troubles laid me, letting what may run

over me. I hate myself both for my abject hopelessness and for my incapacity to take comfort at the hands of those about me. But oh! the deadliness of their life is past description; they have neither breadth nor health in their thoughts. I am not speaking of the old women; their lives are at an end; they sit as little children there, simple of heart; what they were I ask not, nor boots it now, for their day is done. But George Fletcher and his family, and my various more distant relatives, and my neighbours far and near — oh, I shall never be able to live here! Believe me; you will soon see me back. Good people, mind you, one and all, according to their lights, God-fearing, law-abiding, nothing questioning, one and all. I shall soon expect to see the earth stand still and roll backwards. Yes; there they trot upon life's highway, chained together, dragging each

other along; not one of them dares stop to pick a flower lest the others should tread on his fingers and toes. And they are so swaddled up in customs and conventions, baby-learned forms of speech and bearing, that there is nothing to be seen of the real man and woman; indeed, I cannot say that I have yet found a mummy worth unrolling. Yesterday a kind of cousin brought her children to see me. There was a small girl who had already learned, poor wretch, to play her little part, to quell the impulses of her young heart, to tune her tongue to a given pitch. She sat on the edge of her chair, feigning indifference to everything, from Chinese chessmen to gingerbread-nuts; it was a positive relief to me when her younger brother, who has not yet learned the most necessary falsehoods, yelled lustily and smashed a tea-cup. I should have been glad to do both myself.

I must unpack my books. A Broadwood is on its way from London; in a few days I hope to have made unto myself some kind of oasis in this desert. I have taken possession of the two rooms on the topmost floor that were my father's nurseries; and there, with my things about me, I mean to be happy against all odds.

Good-bye for to-day. Do you remember this morning a fortnight ago? It might be last year — it might be yesterday! How strange is the beat of Time's wings!

Your EMILIA.

Letter IV.

Graysmill, August 2d.

Now that's the kind of letter I like to have! Only my heart sickens for thee. At each word I hear your voice; at every pause, the little ripples that run away with it so sweetly. I cannot even find it in me to scold you for your many follies. Young woman, I don't approve of you, but you are the sweetest creature that ever walked this earth. Thanks be where thanks are due that I am a woman; you would have been my bane had I been born a man!

But, to be serious, I have been thinking things out; you must leave your mother, Constance, and come to me. You have lived this kind of life long

enough; and — believe me, my dearest — you are not strong enough to bear it longer unharmed.

Shall I be a little cruel to you? Well, my own, I think that if you looked into your heart, searchingly and truly, as you always declare you know not how, you would find that it is more cowardice than duty binds you to Mrs. Rayner. She bore you, you say, she brought you up — Good Lord! and how! If you were not a pearl among women, what would you be by this time? No, you know as well as I do that it is cowardice, not duty, prevents you from taking this step.

I shall never forget what you said to me once, when first I knew you; it was in Florence, and we were leaning out of window in my room. I remember it the better because it was during this conversation that I ventured to put my arm round your waist for the first time.

"Now I call this pleasant!" you said. "Here am I looking out of window with a nice girl's arm round my waist, and right away from my mother. She doesn't even know where I am!"

I loved my mother so much that this shocked me extremely, and I told you so. You flushed, I remember, and cried: —

"Oh, but you don't know what my life is! You don't know what it is to long with all your might to get away from somebody, somebody who has hung over you ever since you were born, so that she seemed to stand between you and the very air you breathed." And then you told me about your marriage; how, in order to be free from her, you took the husband, rich and infamous, into whose arms she threw you in your innocence; how, at the end of a few months, you returned home doubly a slave, to be crushed, year in, year out, by love that showed itself almost

as hate; bound now in such a way that if any other love were offered you, you could not take it.

And how old are you now? Twenty-four. Still her puppet, her doll, for that is what you are; she dresses and undresses you from morning till night, then struts up and down the streets of Europe, showing her pretty plaything. You say she has no thought but you, loves you so much that it would break her heart if you left her. Look here, Constance: you knew my mother; you know then what it means to live nobly and truly in the light of a greater goodness than the world yet understands. God, or whoever made you, made your soul very white; how dare you let the smuts fall upon it? How dare you tread among falsehoods, you that have heard of Truth?

Try, my dearest, try to be brave; surely it is the duty of each one of us to live the noblest life he can. The world is so

beautiful! It is only ourselves and our mistakes that lie foul upon it. When the most holy of human ties, defying nature, becomes the bane of those it binds, it is better to break it than to let one's life cast a daily blot, as it were, on the sanctity of motherhood and the love of the child.

Come to me; live with me in peace awhile! We will think and read together, master ourselves, and find some path to tread. I, too, am in need of resolution. Whilst my dear mother lived, she held me by the hand. You know how, when two walk together, the weaker unconsciously leaves it to the stronger to lead the way? Well, so it was with me; and now I must learn to find my path alone. I know now what she meant when she said that the first use to which a man must put his courage is to being himself.

All good be with you, dear heart.

EMILIA.

Letter V.

Graysmill, August 7th.

Dearest, I wrote you such a stern letter the other day, that I feel I must write again before the week comes round. It was, after all, a silly promise we made each other to write just once a week, neither more nor less. This time I write at odds with myself. It's all very well to talk about sincerity, it baffles one completely at times; there isn't a greater liar under the sun at this moment than Emilia Fletcher. My outward life is all out of tune with my inward self. Perhaps if you saw me with my old ladies, you would say: "Quite right; please them by all means, sit with them, drive with them, make small talk, listen to their little tales.

It pleases them, and it doesn't harm you." But I answer: Is it right? Is it not rank hypocrisy? Is affection won by false pretences worth the having? I tell you, I am playing a part all day long. I read to them out of books that I either despise or abhor; I play to them music unworthy of the name; I nod my head in acquiescence when my very soul cries no. Nor is that all; I take my place each morning in the centre of the room, open the Bible, and in pious voice, I, Infidel, read forth the prayers that are to strengthen the household through the day. When, at a given point, all the maid-servants rise, whirl round in their calico gowns and turn their demure backs to me as they kneel in a row, I know not whether to laugh or cry. O Constance, it is infamous of me! And why do I do it? Out of consideration for them? out of kind-heartedness? Not a bit of it! Vanity, my dear; sheer

vanity. If they cared for me less, if I did not feel that they almost worship me, holding out their old hands to me for all the pleasure that their day still may bring, would I do it? No; for then I should not care, as I feel I do now, to keep their good opinion, even at the expense of making myself appear better, according to their lights, than I really am. I am a worm; I never thought I could sink so low. It was so easy to live in tune with Truth beside my mother; but she was Truth's high-priestess; she never swerved from the straight path.

I went to church last Sunday; there's a confession! Another such act of cowardice, and I am lost. It never entered my head, of course, to go the first Sunday I was here; and as it so happened that I had a headache that day, no comment was made upon my absence. But on Saturday the vicar said something about "to-mor-

row"; Uncle George invited himself to dinner after service; and when Aunt Caroline asked me, at breakfast on Sunday, what hat I was going to put on, I replied, "The small one," and followed her like a lamb. I don't know what to do now. This afternoon, the good little old lady asked me to call with her on a friend whose father died last week, and I went, Heaven knows why. I was well served out. There they sat a mortal hour, blowing their noses and praising their God, until I could have shrieked. When I had safely seen Aunt Caroline home, I set off for a long walk in the gloaming; the silent earth was stretched in peace beneath the deepening sky, the moon rose among great clouds that floated like dragons' ghosts upon the blue. And I cried out within myself for very pain that I who had perception of these things should live so lying and so false a life.

Perhaps I am not quite myself yet; so much sorrow came to me at once that all my strength has left me. But it is cowardly to make excuses.

I hear you: "There you go, old wise-bones! Here's a storm in a tea-cup! It's much better to behave properly *out*side anyway, than to hurt people's feelings and make them think worse of you than they need, by showing them what a wicked infidel you are. Besides, what does it matter?"

Little one, do you remember how we shocked each other that Christmas morning in Florence, when we made a round of the churches together? I can see you still, you pretty thing, crossing yourself at the door of Santa Maria Novella. With all the strictness of my nineteen years I was simply horrified.

"Constance!" I cried, "what on earth are you doing?"

"I don't like to be left in the cold," you replied; "if there are any blessings going, I may as well have my share."

"But, dearest," said I, "you don't believe in it!"

"Of course I don't, but it may be true, for all that; how do we know? Do let me enjoy myself, you dear old granny! The stale water may not do me any good, but it won't do me any harm either, now will it?"

Oh, dear, how the smell of the church comes back with the remembered words! It was a long time ago. Dear and sweet one, I must not think of you too much, I long for you so.

Yours in endless love,

EMILIA.

Letter VI.

Fletcher's Hall, August 12th.

You must do as you think best. You know that I long for you, that the thought of your wasted life is constant pain to me. Think again, think every day, and if ever you can make up your mind to leave Mrs. Rayner, you know that I am here, that all I have is yours also. I shall say no more.

So you have seen him, and he asked after me. Well. What was he doing in Homburg, I wonder? Not that I care. I really believe, Constance, that I care no longer. And yet it so happens that last night I thought of him a good deal. It came about so. Grandmamma had gone to bed, and I went into Aunt Caro-

line's room to light her candles. There are some little water-colours round the mirror that she painted as a girl. I stopped to look at them, and the poor soul took them down one by one to show me. There was a story attached to each, and her eyes brightened with remembrance of the past. Most of the little pictures were different views of the same house. Suddenly she gave a little smile.

"Wait a minute; I'll show you another picture, Milly — my best picture." (They will call me Milly; there's no help for it.) "I have never shown it to any one before, but you are a good girl; I think I should like to show it to you."

She cleared a space upon her dressing-table, lighted a third candle, a fourth, making a little illumination; then from her wardrobe she brought an old desk, and unlocked it solemnly with a key that always hangs upon her watch-chain. The

desk was full of treasures, — letters, flowers, ends of ribbon, all neatly labelled. She opened a little case and placed in my hands the portrait of a young man.

I hardly knew how to take it. "It is beautiful," I said; "what a handsome face!" Then the veil of silence and old age fell from her heart; she told me the whole tale. Nothing new, of course. She had loved, and — strange to say! — the man had done likewise; they were engaged, but because his family was not equal to hers in birth, her brother-in-law, my grandfather, would not hear of the match, and obliged her to break it off. Yet another sin to add to his score!

"I think," said I, "that you should have married him, all the same."

The old woman blew her nose, rose, and kissed me.

"You are the first that ever told me so," she said; "I think so, too."

It was past midnight when I left her, and I must confess that my own eyes were not dry.

"Is he still alive?" I asked, as I reached the door.

The old woman smiled.

"I don't know," she said, "but I shall know in good time; please God we shall soon meet again in a better land."

I lay awake a long time in the night, marvelling at her constancy and her faith. But then I wept to think how many women, even as she, have held one only flower in their hands, clung to it still when colour and scent were gone, refusing to pluck another; wept, too, to think how many such as she are buoyed up by a hope I cannot share. I wonder what it feels like, this implicit faith in an after life! It must make a difference, even in love. Perhaps we who believe in one life only cling with the greater

passion to what we love, seeing that, once lost, we have no hope of re-possession.

Well, it's a sad world. But a funny one, too. I was quite shy of meeting Aunt Caroline again this morning, lest the remembrance of what she had told me over-night should make her feel ill-at ease; lest, in fact, she had repented of her confidence. And I stood quite a while outside the breakfast-room door, like a fool. But as I entered, her beaded cap was bobbing over an uplifted dish-cover.

"Oh, good morning, Milly!" she said. "No, sister, it's not Upton's fault. The bacon's beautiful, only cook can't cut a rasher."

And again I was in my common dilemma; I didn't know whether to laugh or cry.

Good-bye, sweetest; take care of yourself.

Letter VII.

Graysmill, August 20th.

Good evening, Mrs. Norris. I am in a very good temper, — and you? (N.B. I had an extra letter this morning; somebody spoils me.)

Now what shall I tell you, Inquisitiveness? Indeed, I tell you all there is to tell. You complain that I never speak about the people I meet; that's true enough. When I find myself in their company, I make the best of it, but I never think about them between whiles. As for Uncle George, why, I dislike him thoroughly. He is handsome in his way, and looks remarkably young,— not that that is exactly a crime! One of my principal objections to his person is a

kind of bachelor smartness he carries about with him. It is quite ridiculous to see him with his daughters, the eldest of whom is just eighteen and engaged to be married. There is nothing of the simplicity of the country gentleman about him, — a simplicity that in many cases covers a multitude of faults. No, I shall never be able to bear him, — neither his juvenility, his jewelry, nor his whiskers — certainly never the scent on his handkerchief! Ouf! I hate him altogether. I promise you that when I find a human being with whom I can exchange an idea, whose thoughts have even wandered half a mile beyond the parish, I shall apprize you of the fact. Meanwhile, dearest, you must put up with my company, as I myself am learning to do. It seems to me almost that I need no one else! I sit here in my room, out there in the woods, and I am content. I read a great deal;

I have just re-read the "Volsunga Saga," and have begun Tolstoi's "Cossacks." I am trying, too, to continue my mother's translation of "Prometheus," but the difference between my work and hers is so great that I sometimes lose heart. However, I shall try to finish it. Her beautiful face and yours look down at me from the shelf above my writing-table, amidst a wealth of flowers; and, as I look up, I can see the sun setting behind the beech-trees, for I sit beside the window. The sky is full of hope, the little clouds are glowing with colour, the trees with fulness of life; a blackbird is singing his heart out in the willow by the pond. I must needs believe that life is worth living. . . .

I have watched all the pink fade from the sky; the mottled clouds are grey and sleepy-looking. I have turned away. You are smiling very sweetly up there;

my table is strewn with things her hand has touched,— I am not quite alone.

Well, good night. I must go down to my dear old ladies and read to them a while before they go to bed.

Your EMILIA.

Letter VIII.

Graysmill, September 4th.

You are a sweet to write so often, and I am a wretched niggard that deserves not one half of what you give. I began to write several times — of course you know that. Take care of yourself; the thought of your coughing troubles me; each time I think of you I hear you cough, and it makes me miserable. I met a child on the Common yesterday, with hair your colour that fell back in thick curls from a forehead almost as white as yours. Need I say that I kissed her? Poor mite, she had such dirty clothes! She told me where she lives; I must make inquiries about her mother. I might be able to help. The existence of poverty is just

beginning to dawn upon me. It is strange how long one can live with one's eyes entirely closed to certain things. In Italy I never thought about it; I sometimes felt sorry for a beggar, but never quite believed in poverty as an actual state; it merely seemed a rather disreputable but picturesque profession. Here in England I have come face to face with destitution; with hunger, labour, sweat, and barren joylessness. My first thought was that money might set all this straight; I made Uncle George laugh by seriously suggesting that I should give of my superfluity to every cottage. Most people here visit the poor; I went with Aunt Caroline at first and saw it all. I soon gave it up. I cannot walk boldly into free human beings' homes and poke my nose into their privacy; I cannot speak to them of the Lord's will and persuade them that all is for the best. I can only give them

money. Little Mrs. Dobb, the rector's wife, thanked me with tears in her eyes for a sum I placed in her hands yesterday. They say she does a great deal of good, and if my money and her religion can work together, by all means let it be so.

Meanwhile I ask myself every day: What is the use of Emilia Fletcher? I really cannot see why I ever was born; my perceptions are keen, but keener than my capabilities. I shall never be able to do anything to help the world; yet I see so much that might be done. I shall not ever be able to lead that life of simple truth, of absolute fidelity to high-set aims, which I yet believe it must be in every man's power to live. Which is the more to be despised — he who perceives a higher path and lacks the resolution to adhere to it, or he who trots along the common road out of sheer short-sighted-

ness? Clearly the first. I am a worm. (You have probably heard this before.)

Well, I am not a very gay companion; I shall leave you for to-day, sweetest.

EMILIA.

Letter IX.

Sunday evening.

I have made a fool of myself; and yet I am happier to-night than I have been this many a day, for I have at least shown myself honest. I did it foolishly, thoughtlessly, I know, and yet,— well, I don't regret it.

I went to church this morning for the last time. I went with Aunt Caroline, as usual, but, as I knelt beside her on entering the pew, I was seized with a great horror of myself. There was I, hypocrite, with silent lips and silent heart, feigning to share in the simple fervour around me, denying my own faith, insulting that of another. However, I sat and knelt and stood and went

through all the forms along with the rest. The sunlight streamed in at the windows, and lay coloured on the dusty floor, on bowed head and Sunday bonnet; through one little white window, just opposite me, I could see a sparrow bobbing up and down on the ivy. Then away sailed my spirit, through the church wall, over the meadows, and into the copse; I pushed my way through the underwood, and picked up a leaf here and there, listening to the gentle voice of the wood-pigeon. And then — you know there is one thought into which all thoughts resolve — I walked with you, dearest, on the hilltops by Fiesole; she, too, was there, and you both laughed at me because I tried to dig up a wild orchid with a flint, and got my hands so dirty.

Then we had that long talk about the possibility of an after-life, which began with the bulb of the orchid — do you remember?

"Nothing is lost in Nature," said my mother. "There is no such thing as annihilation; death is surely transubstantiation."

"Perhaps then, after all," said I, "the noblest part of us, the self, that invisible core which we call soul, is just a drop, as it were, in a great soul-ocean, whose waves wrap creation, and into which we shall fall. What's the matter, Constantia?"

"I can't listen to you any more, you prosy things; you make me melancholy. Go and be waves if you like, you two; I'm going to have white wings and be an angel!"

* * * * * *

"I believe in God Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth."

These words roused me with a hard and sudden shock. I had completely forgotten where I was; I looked about me, half

dazed, and saw every one standing except myself. Must I, too, rise and say the Creed? I did not hesitate, because I did not think. I simply stood up and left the church.

After dinner I went to the rectory; I felt that my former hypocrisy and cowardice must be atoned for without delay. Besides, as Goethe's mother used to say, there is no need to stare at the devil, it is better to swallow him whole. Well, I went to Mr. Dobb, and confessed myself. He was less shocked at my disbelief than I had expected, but my profession of it troubled him considerably. He spoke a great deal about example, about the leading of the masses, and altogether seems to hold avowed lack of faith, a greater sin than feigned belief.

Of course he had plenty to say on the subject; he seems to be an honest man, and I must admit that much of what I

heard impressed me. I envied him the ease with which he spoke, the ready-coined language he was free to use. I could find no words in which to prove that I, too, had a religion. I wonder, shall I ever be able to tell another what it is that I feel, as by means of a sixth sense, when earth and heaven are fairest, when poets sing their best and music is most divine, when the souls of men and women leap to their eyes and their hearts lie bare; then something within me smiles and shivers, and I say, "This — this is God!"

Oh, it is all very well to talk of being sincere! Again and yet again I must say it. For the lips cannot speak what the spirit feels. And then, — why, I spoiled my truthful day by a lie at the end. How could I go to those two old dears and say, "I cannot pray with you or go to church any more, I am an infidel." How could

I? I said instead, "My mother brought me up in a different faith; I tried to go to your church, but I cannot, and I think you would not wish me to act against my conscience in so sacred a matter, so we will go our ways."

Oh, what a struggling world it is! And how weary one becomes of the incessant strife when those upon whose hearts one might lean are far away, unknown, or dead! Oh, I am very lonely. What is life without love? It is not to be borne. Do you remember what it was to lie in your cot, to watch the firelight on the ceiling, feeling the darkness without; and, as you lay snug in your little world within the world, to see your mother lean over your pillow, a great Heaven-roof of love, — to be lifted, weak and small and trustful, in her arms, to feel your weary head pressed close against her breast? O Constance, I would give all — my very

eyesight — to feel an arm about me in the dark, to yield up Self, to rest. We women are poor wretches; no man would ever feel so, I think.

Good night; my candle has burned low in the socket, the paper is flaring already, I shall have to undress in the dark.

Good night, dearest.

E

Letter X.

Graysmill, September 20th.

Blessings upon you, my sweet dearest; your birthday is the day of days to me. How could I live without you? I am purely selfish when I wish you perfect joy and a long golden life; it is almost like praying for fine weather! All the strings of my heart go towards you, Constance Norris, and are knotted in your bosom. Be happy, be well, my darling, else I suffer. We shall not be apart on your next birthday, I think. I have evolved a marvellous scheme. Your mother is still young, and a very handsome woman; why don't you marry her? Really, it's a plan worth attempting; couldn't you persuade one of your numerous admirers to transfer his affections? Then, Constantia

mia, we two could live together. We should mostly live abroad, following the sunshine; but for a part of the year we should stay here in England. Don't wrinkle up your dear nose! You will be every bit as much in love with the country as I am, when once you know it well. I wish I could show it you now; the woods are changing colour, 'tis a glowing world, and your lungs have never tasted such air as blows on Graysmill Heath. You would be very happy in the woods in summer; you could lie down and bring your face on a level with the flowers, and I should sit by and love you. There would be little sunbeams piercing the roof of leaves and twinkling about us, and just enough breeze to clear your brow of curls. O Constance! Why are we so far apart? Only one life, and then parted! But one must not think of such things.

I send you a little ring that I found the other day in Miltonhoe; there is a kiss on the red stone, don't lose it.

Blessings upon you, my heart of gold.

EMILIA.

Letter XI.

Graysmill, October 5th.

Three several times have I begun to write to you, but I came to the conclusion that it is better not to write at all than to give vent to such feelings as mine. Besides, I had nothing, positively nothing, to tell you. Furthermore, you did not deserve a letter. However, as it is all too long since you honoured me with a communication, Mrs. Norris, I feel I must write and remind you of my existence. I am well, thank you, but the world's a dull place.

Grandmamma and Aunt Caroline — perhaps myself, who knows? — are in a great state of excitement to-day because a niece of theirs is coming here on a

visit. I heard of her existence for the first time last week, and immediately decided to invite her to Fletcher's Hall. For, Constance, let me whisper it, the old ladies — bless their hearts! — are killing me. This person, Ida Seymour by name, is a spinster of some forty winters, a kind of roving, charitable star, from what I gather, who spends her life visiting from place to place with a trunkful of fancy work, pious books, and innocent sources of amusement,— a fairy godmother to old ladies, pauper children, and bazaars. My vanity has run its course, and I shall gladly yield the place of honour to this worthy soul. May she stay long!

That is absolutely all the news I have for you, and, indeed, it is more than you deserve; for you are about as lazy as you are sweet, which is saying a good deal. If I don't get a letter to-morrow, I shall be on the brink of despair. At the

approach of post time, I am nearly ill with anticipation, and afterwards fall headlong into deepest melancholy.

Your ill-used

EMILIA.

Letter XII.

Graysmill, October 10th.

Sweet, your letter of Thursday comforted me wondrous much; but I have something to tell you, and my impatience will not even let me dwell on the joy it was to read words of yours again. Well; yesterday was a dull day, the sky was covered all the morning, and at dinner-time it began to rain. I sat in my room in the afternoon and read "Richard Feverel" until, looking up from my book, I saw that the rain had ceased. The wind had risen, and, in the west, a hole had been poked through the grey mantle, showing the gilded edge of a snowy cloud against a patch of blue. Out I ran, across the garden and the little park that touches

the heath, then through my dear beech-wood until I reached a certain clearing where the ground goes sheer down at one's feet and where one may behold, over the tree-tops, stretches of wood and meadow in the plain below. I sprang on to a knoll, and there stood breathless, watching the rout of the tumbled clouds.

Something started beside me,—I started also, for these woods are always very lonely, — and, to my surprise, I saw a young man. Imagine a very tall slight fellow, carelessly dressed, at one and the same time graceful and ungainly,— I have come to the conclusion that he is physically graceful, but that a certain shyness and nervousness of temperament produce at times self-consciousness and awkwardness of bearing. It is difficult to describe his face; I don't know whether he is merely interesting or actually beautiful; here again there is some discrepancy

between flesh and spirit, for the features are not regular, but the expression exquisite. I suppose he might be considered plain; his nose is large, rather thin, and not straight; his mouth is large but finely shaped; I think he smiles a little crookedly. Anyway, his eyes are beautiful; they are set far apart, and are strangely expressive. For the rest, he is more freckled than any one I ever saw, and his hair — which is of no particular colour — is rather long and thrown off the temples, save for one lock that continually falls forward. You will think I am in love with the apparition, to judge by the way in which I dwell on his description; indeed, I am almost inclined to think so myself!

Well! I stood and stared at him; his hat was off, an open book was in his hand, and he gazed at me as one not well awake, that has been roused from dreams;

with something in his looks, too, of the startled animal that would run away and dare not. There is no knowing how long we might have stood there staring at each other, but for a sudden gust of wind that whisked off my hat, whereupon the young man and I both started downhill in pursuit. The wind was playful, and led us a fine dance; we were obliged to laugh. When at last he caught and handed back to me my property, we were thoroughly exhausted and sat down at the foot of the hill on the mossy tree-roots. I am sure we must have looked very silly, for we were so out of breath that we could not leave off laughing,— my young man has the heartiest laugh I ever heard. When we had somewhat recovered, I said:

"I wonder why one always laughs when something blows away?"

"It is," he replied, with mock gravity, "what people call a wise dispensation of

Providence. There is nothing between laughter and tears."

It never entered my head to get up and go my way; his shyness, too, seemed vanished; we were quite at ease.

"Have you ever noticed," asked he, "how many different kinds of moss there are in these woods?" — and we began to count the varieties as we sat. At last I looked up and saw that the heavens were blue.

"I'm going uphill again," said I, "to see the sunset. How quickly the sky has cleared! It almost seems as if some invisible broom had made a clean sweep of the clouds." To which the young man answered:

"It was a birch-broom. I see the marks of it."

We climbed the hill side by side; it did not seem at all strange at the time. When we reached the summit, the sun was

setting in fullest glory, and we were silent. Suddenly he cried:

"Let us be fire-worshippers! There is more of God in that great light than in all the gospels of mankind."

"What a queer, comforting thing," said I, "to hear from a stranger in a wood."

It struck me afterwards that perhaps I, too, had said a queer thing; but we seemed to understand each other. Presently we sat down again, and he talked to me about the Parsees; he appears to know a great deal about them.

We narrowly escaped a second run downhill; again the wind seized my hat, but he nimbly caught it on the wing.

"Why don't you do as I do?" he asked, passing his fingers through his hair. "It's a great mistake to wear a hat, especially if one has a turn for trespassing."

"Who tells you," laughed I then, "that

I am trespassing? For aught you know, this may be my own ground."

The young man looked at me curiously.

"Are you, then, Emilia Fletcher?" he cried.

I nodded assent; whereupon he held out his hand and jerked his head forward; it was evidently an attempt at courtesy. I took the hand and laughed outright: he looked so funny with his bright eyes twinkling beneath the tangled forelock.

"I have heard of you," he said, "and I am glad to meet you. The other day I asked to whom the land belonged, and was told that you were half Italian and rather eccentric. You seem to be a human being. I am glad to have met you. My name is Gabriel Norton."

Here the big bell rang out from the house, summoning me to tea,—it had rung once already. So the apparition and I parted company.

I wonder if he has caught cold; I am sure that I have; I have been sneezing all the evening.

It may be very pleasant and romantic to sit on the moss with a wood-sprite after a shower, but perhaps it is not very wise.

I must go and say good night downstairs. I left Miss Seymour reading sentimental ballads on pauper childhood to the old ladies; it must now be close upon their bed-time.

Good night, beloved.

Your EMILIA.

P.S. I forgot to say that he has one really fine point: his hands are quite beautiful. I keep on wondering what you would think of him. O dio! how good it was to laugh again.

Letter XIII.

Graysmill, October 18th.

Very dear, I hope this letter will reach Vienna before you do, and welcome you there. The words we write in one mood are read when another has taken its place; perhaps you are as merry as a bird in spring by this time,— perhaps not. My poor little dear. I know myself what it is to sink into a bottomless pit of senseless misery, but I must tell you that it nearly always happens when I am idle.

A woman that is debarred from woman's best profession — wifehood and motherhood — must find some other work to do; idleness, uselessness — above all, idleness — are the hotbed of all manner of follies. The stupidest man in existence, working

day by day at the worldliest work, has the better of us in this, that he is weighted, so to speak, and cannot flutter to and fro with every breeze that blows. You say that you cannot work, that you have heard all this at least a thousand times; well, never mind, hear it once more!

Take German lessons, your German is very bad; go on with your singing, your sweet voice is very ignorant; read, make some study, however unprofitable, of the French Revolution, the Renaissance, the Conquest of Peru, anything, anything you like; or buy a sewing-machine at least, and make flannel petticoats for the poor; anything, Constantia, only don't for Heaven's sake sit there with your hands in your lap, listening to the gabble of fools, while Mrs. Rayner touches up a curl here and a frill there, from morning till night, for ever and ever.

But now to other things, for indeed I

am not in the fault-finding mood you might suppose. Only, as you know well, I can always worry about you, at any time.

Well, I have seen my wood-sprite again, this very morning. I could not sleep after six, although I twice covered up my head with the bed-clothes and made believe I was not awake; so I got up, and the young sun was so beautiful, driving the mists out of the valley, that I went out.

Between the flower garden and the park, there lies a shrubbery; green paths wind in and out between high walls of box and laurel, leading one at length to a little blue door in an old wall. Well, I was stepping along between the evergreens as fast as the moss on the pebbles would let me, swinging my hat round as I went, and singing loudly, when I thought I heard footsteps round the bend of the

path. I turned the corner — nobody; only a little scrambling sound, and the treacherous flutter of a branch in the laurel hedge. Of course I immediately thought of poachers, and in my imagination already saw Emilia Fletcher stretched a lifeless corpse upon the ground. I took three backward steps, then paused. Silence and stillness reigned.

Pooh! thought I, it's nothing, and with a bold, swift step I walked past the fearful spot. No sooner had I passed than there came another crackle; I turned and beheld a luminous eye between the branches. Whether I turned pale with fright or not, I cannot tell; but a hand came forth, a foot, then, with considerable difficulty, an entire body; and on the path before me stood my dishevelled friend, covered with green dust and blushes.

"I have no excuse to offer," said he.

I laughed; there was nothing else to do.

"You did startle me," said I, "but I forgive you."

I did not ask him what he was doing in my shrubbery, nor did he offer the least explanation.

"Are you going for a walk?" said he, simply, "and, if so, may I go with you?"

I was glad enough, and we had taken a few steps forward when he suddenly clapped his hands to his pockets.

"I shall have to get into the bush again," he cried, with rueful face; "I must have dropped 'Peer Gynt.'"

And in he scrambled, returning triumphant with an exceedingly shabby book.

We walked a full hour and a half, through the park, through the woods, and through the park again, for he insisted on bringing me back to the little blue door. We talked mostly about "Peer Gynt," which, by the way, he is reading

in the original. He seems to read every possible language, although he declares he speaks nothing but English. We did not talk at all about ourselves, so I know nothing further about him, save that he lives in a cottage on the heath towards Miltonhoe, with his father and his aunt.

When we parted company, he asked me if I would mind going to see his aunt.

"I believe," said he, "that she ought to call first on you,— at least, she says so, — but that she'll never do. If I landed her at your very door, she'd never find courage to ring the bell."

"Very well," said I; "I'll come to her instead."

And the sprite vanished.

I think I shall go to-morrow, or perhaps next day.

Good-bye, sweet,

Your EMILIA.

Letter XIV.

Graysmill, October 23d.

You are a dear to take such becoming interest in my friend. I have a great deal more to tell you about the lunatic, as you call him, who, by the way, is a great deal saner than either you or I.

Well, I went last Thursday. It took me some time to find the cottage. After much rambling I came upon it in the most secluded part of the Common, in a slight hollow. It is a sort of double cottage, partly thatched, standing in a good-sized garden. I marched through a rickety gate, and made for the house door. The garden is one wild medley of vegetables, fruit-trees, and flowers, luxuriant still, in spite of the late season. I was

just bending over a chrysanthemum when I heard a startling "Hulloa!" and found myself accosted by the gardener, who stood, spade in hand, at the opposite end of the gravel walk. He was in his shirt-sleeves; his corduroy trousers were more picturesque than respectable; an enormous straw hat, well tanned and chipped by wear, was stuck on the back of his head.

"Hulloa!" he cried again.

I approached and asked, as soon as I could do so without shouting, whether Miss Norton were at home.

"She is at home," replied the man, "and who may you be?"

"Perhaps you will kindly tell her," said I, making up by my civility for his lack of it, "that Emilia Fletcher has come to see her."

Down went the spade, off came the disreputable hat.

"God bless my soul!" he cried, rubbing the earth off his fingers, "so it's you, is it?"

He seemed doubtful whether his hand were fit to offer me or not, so I relieved him of his anxiety by shaking it warmly.

"Come on indoors," said he; "let's surprise them; Gabriel will be delighted," and he set off at a trot, I after him. He was not a grand runner. I conjectured at once that his health is not good, and that he probably looks ten years older than he really is. His hair is almost white, his face deeply wrinkled.

When we reached the cottage door, he pushed me gently in, and I found myself in what appeared to be a lumber-room. There was a table in the centre covered with bundles, books, and papers, on the summit of which, precariously poised on the lid of a biscuit-tin, stood a jug and some glasses; piles of books lay on the

floor; in one corner stood a stack of brooms, rakes, guns, fishing-rods, sticks, and umbrellas; and a marvellous medley of coats and hats, baskets, cords, etc., loaded a groaning row of pegs.

"Wait here," said the old man, tilting the only chair in such a way that a Bible, a match-box, and a cocoa-tin filled with nails were safely deposited on the floor. He then popped his head in at three several doors that opened on to the apartment (it was intended, I afterwards discovered, for the hall), and finally disappeared behind one of them which led straight on to a flight of stairs. Suddenly I heard a scuffling, a sound as of some one coming down head foremost, and my friend appeared, book and forelock and all.

"This is nice of you!" he cried; then his father stumped downstairs again, followed by a tall, sweet-faced woman.

"There, Jane," said he, "there she is."

I went up to her; she was, indeed, very shy. "Dear, dear," was all she said; "deary me, think of this, it's very kind of you, I'm sure," squeezing my hand the while as if it had been a sponge.

She led me off through the door to the right, into a comparatively presentable parlour; but her brother took my other hand and pulled me in the opposite direction.

"No, no," he said; "no, no, we'll go into the kitchen and have tea."

"Yes, come," said Gabriel; "I'm hungry, aren't you? Let's go and find something to eat."

So we recrossed the hall and passed through a good-sized room which looked like a second-hand bookshop. Books overflowed the shelves, and lay in piles in every available corner, — the floor, the table, the old upright piano, the very

chairs, were covered with dusty volumes. Out of this room led the kitchen, which at least looked clean. A rosy little maid was leaving after the day's work as we entered.

"Sit down," said Gabriel's father to me; "sit down, my dear; you shall have some tea in a minute." And he began taking plates down from the dresser. Miss Norton, meanwhile, had disappeared, and presently returned with a loaf, dragging Gabriel after her.

"I can't keep that boy out of the larder," she said plaintively.

Gabriel laughed and fetched the tea-pot, also a jug and two paper bags. I thought I had better help, too. I discovered some knives in the drawer of the table, and set them out.

"Tea or cocoa?" asked Richard Norton, pointing his finger at tea-pot and jug in turn. I chose cocoa, I can't think why.

"That's lucky," sighed Gabriel; "there's no tea in the bag."

He made the cocoa, Jane Norton cut the bread; at last we sat down. I don't think I ever enjoyed a meal so much in my life. They ate voraciously, and we talked meanwhile in the silliest fashion, about nothing at all, laughing until the tears rolled down our cheeks.

My friend is very funny, but his fun is of the kind that cannot bear repeating; taken away from himself, separated from his personality, it would sound merely foolish. You know what I mean. I sat next Miss Norton during tea. When we had done, Gabriel stood up, chair and all, and came beside me.

"What do you think of us?" he asked. "Aren't we rather nice?"

"Yes, indeed," I replied; "and the funny part of it is that I feel as though I'd known you all my life."

"That's just how I feel with you," said Gabriel, and Richard Norton added,—

"I like you; you're a nice girl; you don't turn up your nose at us because we live in our own way. You're a nice girl."

"I like your way of living," said I, then. "From what I can see, it seems to me you are about as free as any one can be in this world, and that is the best of all things, — freedom."

"You've hit it!" cried Richard Norton, bringing his flat hand down on the table. "We are free!"

"Now I'll tell you," said Gabriel. "This time last year we had horrible lodgings in Bloomsbury. Father went every day to drudgery in a dirty office, helping another man to rob his fellow-creatures; aunt there gave lessons,— she can't teach a bit; she was only putting nonsense into the heads of future men and

women, and, such as it was, putting it there wrong. I was doing likewise, and I teach worse than she does. Of an evening I wrote drivel for the papers. We were, every one of us, useless and miserable. At last one day I said —"

"You did!" interrupted his father. "You may live to be a hundred, you'll never say anything so wise again."

"I said: 'Look here! How many lives have we?' 'One,' replied father. 'What are we alive for?' 'I don't know,' replied father. 'Neither do I; only I know that life's not worth living as we live it. Let's go into the country.'"

"I beg your pardon, Gabriel," interrupted his father again; "it was not quite so, it was better than that. The boy lectured me, Miss Fletcher,— pitched into me, and I deserved it. He told me I was fifty-five and a fool for my years. So I was. There was I, grinding away,

— what for? We never saw each other, we never saw the fields, we were selling all the joys of life for three farthings. So we decided to drudge no more. Gabriel would have continued, but I could not allow that; I wanted him here. We found we should have just enough money to rent a cottage, buy body-covering and plain food. So here we are. And we are happy. As Gabriel said, What is the use of toiling for more, when the unprofitable work that brings us a few extra shillings takes away our capacities for enjoying life? Here we are, happy all day, eh, Gabriel? He writes his poetry and devours his books, I devour mine, Jane devours hers; we are learning now all the beauties of Nature, and man's best thoughts. We are very happy."

A vision of my present life flitted across me, like a cloud on a sunlit field.

"Oh!" said I, "how I envy you!

Nothing useless, not a clog about you, no stupid formalities, stifling luxuries, no daily lies and false duties."

"Have you all these?" asked Gabriel.

"Not so badly as some people, but badly enough. I have money, and no end of respectable relations."

He laughed, and made a wry face.

When I found that it was time to wend my way home, Gabriel offered to walk with me. I was very glad. On the way out, he stopped in the hall and knocked half the things off the pegs.

"Beloved aunt!" he cried, "there used to be a hat somewhere!"

I assured him that he need not discomfort himself for my sake, and he bounded forth bareheaded, with a yell of exultation. On the road we had a long and somewhat warm discussion on suicide, which was started by an essay of Montaigne's he happened to be reading. Every now and

again he pulled the book from his pocket and read me extracts, until it was too dark to see; even then he once struck a match to find a passage.

For the sake of argument we occasionally took opposite sides, but, in fact, we were both agreed upon the principal point; namely, that although man enters the world against his will, he may surely choose the time and the manner of his exit. That this is every one's right we both believe, yet believe, also, that the right should be sparingly used. For although suicide might almost be considered an act of duty on the part of those suffering from incurable disease, mental or physical, most of us, however useless and superfluous we may at times believe ourselves to be, have, willy-nilly, the fate of some fellow-creature bound up with our own; and it is surely an act of unpardonable cowardice to make our escape

from a world of difficulties, leaving others to bear the burden of our faults.

But, really, I must put an end to this letter; I never wrote such a long one in my life, not even I, not even to you. My friend left me as we approached Graysmill, saying that he dared not set foot on the confines of respectability.

That was Thursday, and I have not seen him since.

Good-bye, my dearest; I kiss your sweet eyes.

EMILIA.

Letter XV.

Graysmill, October 31st.

No, of course I have not said a word about it at the house; what an idea! Why should I? Good gracious me, they'd think me mad. Besides, I am my own mistress, and am not answerable to anybody for my actions. Not for the world would I speak of the Nortons to any of these people here.

Ida Seymour is a fixture, for the present, at least. Her good offices leave me a great deal more liberty than I enjoyed during the first few months. Apart from meal-times I give some two hours a day to my old ladies, and work hard the rest of the time. I have finished "Prometheus," and laid it aside to await revision;

I am now sorting my mother's papers, with a view to some day publishing a selection of them. Perhaps. But there is such a sacredness to me about all she has left behind, that I cannot yet bear the thought of sending anything that remains of her out into the cold world, to be misjudged and misprized.

How can you ask me what colour his eyes are? When did you know me care for any one — except mamma — whose eyes were not blue? His are very dark, and very beautiful. I cannot think, by the way, why I ever told you that he might perhaps be considered plain. I looked at him hard yesterday, and cannot think what possessed me to say such a thing; for he is certainly as far from plain as any man I ever set eyes on. It's really very strange that I did not see it at once.

You see, we have met again. Five days passed, and I must admit that I found

them dull. To be quite sincere, I will also admit that I once walked towards Miltonhoe, and was disappointed not to meet him. At last, on Wednesday morning, I received a note from him. He writes a good hand, although not a firm one — he makes two or three of his letters in two or three different ways. I would send you the letter, only mine is sure to be heavy enough without enclosures. It ran thus: —

Dear Miss Fletcher, — I am afraid of your butler. What is to be done? I tried this afternoon to pay you a call, but my courage vanished at the lodge. I think we did not quite exhaust our subject last Thursday. I have thought a great deal more about it, and I dare say you have done likewise. Can I see you by any means without facing the butler? I shall sit in the laurel hedge every morning, on the chance of your taking another walk before breakfast.

Your humble servant,

GABRIEL NORTON.

I did not go next morning, although I wished to do so. I hardly know why I waited until Friday; it was not only unreasonable on my part, but also not quite straightforward. How is it that, even when circumstances might enable us to act according to our impulses, some unexpected inconsistency in our own selves throws a bar across the path? I begin to think that it must be an idle dream, — sincerity, self-honesty. My thoughts are fixed upon it constantly, I strive towards it with heart and soul; yet daily, under the very eyes of my own scrutiny, I lie either in word or in action.

Well, on Friday I went, and we had a happy time together. I cannot tell you how grateful I am to have met this creature, to come once again into contact with a being whose footsteps fall near my own. We are are very different, yet I feel that our faces are turned towards the same

light. I told him a great deal about my mother; she would have loved him.

There goes the second bell, and I have not even washed my hands. Farewell for to-day.

Yours in all truth,

EMILIA.

Letter XVI.

Graysmill, November 8th.

My little dear Constance, first and foremost I am freezing, and have got a red nose, I'm certain. Is it cold with you also? The week has been a full one. Uncle George's eldest daughter was married the day before yesterday, and there were great festivities in the family. The marriage should have taken place last June, but was postponed owing to the grandfather's death.

What extraordinary creatures we are! I cannot tell you how many Emilias were at that wedding. Something in me was touched by the sight of a large family assembled from far and wide, excited and united for the moment by a common

sentiment; something in me was lonely beyond description, for I was not of them; and whereas I smiled and made merry in a white gown and felt the tears come to my eyes when the little bride went forth under a shower of rice, I was nevertheless looking on at the smiles and tears of the others with doubt and cynicism rampant in my heart.

Poor little bride! I wondered how much she thought she loved him, how much he cared for her; and where her smiles and her golden dreams would be this time next year, poor little white thing, veiled in ignorance.

It is not altogether a bad world, for all that. I certainly have not found it so; but then it has been my good fortune to draw near the hearts and brains of some very dear mortals. I cannot tell you how fond I have grown of this creature, — Gabriel Norton, I mean. I can say this

openly to you, because you are sensible and know me, and will not think at once, because he is a man and I a woman, that there is any question here of sentiments exceeding friendship. We are neither of us children; he is three or four years older than I, I should imagine, — twenty-nine or thirty, or thereabouts.

For aught I know, he may already have loved and lost as I have; and were it even possible that I should ever love again, I hardly think that Gabriel would be the man. Anyway, we are excellent friends, and I believe that my companionship has become as precious to him as his is to me. We meet now every two or three days, and walk together, either before breakfast or after early dinner.

Did your ears burn on Wednesday? I told him a great deal about you. We had been having one of our customary argumentative conversations, principally about

marriage, more especially still about the horrors of false marriages, and this led me to tell him that the best friend I have on earth is infamously bound for the whole of her dear life by a marriage contracted before she was seventeen years old. He thinks, dearest, with me, that you ought to face the horrors of the divorce court rather than linger on in chains, and certainly listen no longer to the considerations, pecuniary and otherwise, which influence your mother.

I fancy, from the way in which he spoke, that his father and mother were not happy together; he has therefore not had in his life the blessing that was mine, — the daily contemplation of an absolutely perfect union. Indeed, he hardly seems to believe in the possibility of ideal marriages, and declares that he himself will certainly never marry unless some law is passed whereby men and women shall be

able to bind themselves for a limited number of years, at the expiration of which they may either renew the bond or go free. I laughed when he said this, for I thought he was jesting; so he was, partly, yet more than half in earnest.

"No, no," said he; "I shall never marry. I had sooner not break the laws of my country, but if it came to be a question between breaking them or the laws of true morality, I should not hesitate in my choice. Love without marriage is a sin against society; marriage without love is a sin against Nature."

Of course he is right. How my mother would have loved him! Do you remember her invectives against marriage? It was the very perfection of the tie between her and my father that filled her with indignation and regret whenever she looked about her and beheld, on all sides, the parody of her heaven.

Good-bye. You are getting very lazy, Mrs. Norris. How dare you leave me letterless so long?

Write directly you get this to

Your loving

EMILIA.

Letter XVII.

Graysmill, November 21st.

For the first time in my life, I have been a little cross with you, Constance of my heart. My anger did not last long, but even when it was practically at an end I felt obliged to play at being cross with you, and therefore would not write. But to-day comes another sweet letter from you, and I am miserable to think you should have had to write a second time before getting an answer to your dear words. Forgive me! I do love you so! I shall tell you quite frankly why I was cross. You must never tease me again about Gabriel Norton. I don't like to be teased at the best of times, and I think it positively wrong to make love a subject

for laughter and nonsense. You see, I allow that I love him; of course I do, but not as you imagine. Surely there is a love of spirit to spirit which stands higher than the material love of man and woman. It is just because we look upon each other in the first place as human beings, as comrades on the road of life, that our friendship is a source of strength and comfort to us. If either were to harbour other thoughts, all that is beautiful in our intercourse must come to an end. No, you are silly; you must never say such things again, promise me that. Why, it is just the very absence of love that *makes* our friendship. If only people would believe this, if only men and women would learn to exchange their thoughts in freedom, to be simple and open in their dealings with each other, what a much better world this world would be!

But you are just like the rest; indeed,

worse than the rest. Because, somehow or other, whether it's the fault of your curls or of your lips, or of your smile, or of your whole sweet self, I know not, but because no man ever draws near you but what you make a fool of him, you seem to think all men resemble your victims, all women you, their bane. No, you don't, though; I malign you. Do you remember saying to me one day: "Try and make yourself appear a little silly sometimes, Emilia, do, now! Men never fall in love with clever women!" And right you were. The only passions I ever inspired flared through their day in the bosoms of women and boys. Never mind! I had sooner have Gabriel's friendship than ten thousand of your lovers; I had sooner see you too, sweet, with such a friend as he to lean upon, than surrounded as you are now by the foolish and ugly admiration of worthless men.

There, enough lecturing for the present. It's understood, eh?

Gabriel and Jane Norton have actually been here to tea. What do you say to that? I must tell you how it came about; it's a long story, but you shall have it all. The other day, my friend and I were overtaken by a rain-storm on the heath; we ran as fast as we could to the Thatched Cottage, and there I remained fully two hours, till the rain had given over. As Gabriel was very restless and unmanageable, I suggested that we might turn his superfluous energy to good account by arranging the library. How those dear creatures keep alive, I cannot imagine; they are helpless and unpractical beyond all belief. Jane Norton has absolutely no sense of order, the household drifts along as best it can. "I hate it so," she groans; "I have a horror of it all." That very afternoon I tore my dress and

wanted to mend it. A brass thimble was soon produced from the kitchen clock, where Jane keeps it "to have it handy," but never were needle and thread more difficult to procure. After much hunting, a dirty reel of white cotton was discovered in the soup-tureen, the needle-case had entirely disappeared; she finally managed, however, to squeeze some rusty kind of skewer out of her pincushion, and with these implements I mended my skirt as best I could. But to return to the library. The confusion we found it in is indescribable. When first we began operations Gabriel stood about in a helpless way, but he became enthusiastic as the work of clearance advanced, and laboured with good will.

"This was a veritable inspiration!" he cried presently, perching himself upon the table; "there hasn't been a corner to sit upon for weeks, not for weeks. It's

very odd: I believe that I much prefer to see things kept in order, only I haven't the least idea how to bring such a state about. None of us have. Why! there's Plato! Blessings upon you, Emilia! He must have been behind the piano quite two months. I have hunted for him high and low." He seized the volume rapturously and began reading aloud.

"That's all Greek to me," said I.

"Come along then," said he, "let's leave off now, the room's beautiful; come, I'll teach you the alphabet."

And this was the germ of a scheme we have started. We had been racking our brains for some time past how to meet during the winter, in defiance of shortening days, cold, rain, and prejudice. Now we have it. He is to teach me Greek, and will come to the house to give me lessons. Thanks to my foreign extraction and to a certain reputation I have got

here for originality, my old ladies were not at all surprised when I told them that a poor gentleman who lived with his father and his aunt towards Miltonhoe was coming twice a week to teach me. On the contrary, their kind old hearts were touched at the mere mention of poverty, and they asked if I wouldn't invite Miss Norton to tea; hence Monday's tea-party, which was exceedingly funny. Ida Seymour had gone to a school treat at Miltonhoe, so my old ladies and I had the place to ourselves. They were much distressed, bless them, at the extraordinary antiquity of Jane Norton's black silk gown; Heaven only knows in what year of Grace it was fabricated, and how she manages to keep it together. I'm afraid I shall have some difficulty in preventing Aunt Caroline from giving Jane a new dress, — she certainly won't rest till she has done so. As

for Gabriel, he was so remarkably dusty and threadbare that I set him at table with his back to the light, in such a manner that his mere silhouette was exposed to Hopkinson's scrutiny. I must allow, however, that he behaved beautifully, and Jane was perfect; she made an excellent impression on grandmamma, who is very anxious I should invite her again.

"In fact," said she, "I don't see why she shouldn't come and have a cup of tea with us every time your teacher comes; then we shall know she has a good tea twice a week at least, poor thing!"

Why can't I see him without these subterfuges? Why can't we meet here in my house in all simplicity, without fear of that monster, the world, and its murderous tongue? It all seemed so good and so simple that morning when he said to me: —

"We will be friends as friends should be; all shall be true and free between us; we shall make exchange of our thoughts, and learn together how to live."

Never mind; I am very fortunate.

Good-bye, my sweet dear, and again, forgive me! I love you.

EMILIA.

Letter XVIII.

Graysmill, November 26th.

Bless you for all your words! Yes, you must come out to me next spring, and then we three can be friends together: three should be more beautiful than two, in such harmony as ours would be. I take it for granted that you and Gabriel will care for each other; it would be a great grief to me if you did not. I hate people I like not to like each other; nothing hurts more — except, perhaps, to oneself dislike a friend's friend.

My Greek is getting on; I am fearfully industrious, and have even pinned up the declensions, written out in a large hand, on my bedroom wall, so that I can learn them whilst I dress.

Gabriel is quite pleased with his pupil, and I have begun to teach him Italian. He reads it very well, but cannot speak it at all at present. We had a long talk, the other day, about his future. I think it will be quite impossible for him to continue this mode of life very long; I find that I am not so happy about him as I was at first. Sometimes I think I should like to give him half my money — how ridiculous it seems that such a thing should be out of the question! — and let him lead the tranquil life of study and contemplation that he loves, send him to other lands where he might wander up and down in the sunshine, seeing the world and all its beauties, — he that has eyes to see, a heart to feel. But then, at other times, I feel that I should like to strip him even of the little he has, and hurl him into the very vortex of life, see him struggle and fight and come out a

conqueror. I see in him the germs of so much greatness that I cannot believe he was meant to dream his days away on the heather. It was right of him, certainly, to break from a course of life he felt himself unable to pursue, and right it is also that he should pause now, and breathe, and feel his wings. But it will soon be time for energy and action. We are not here for ourselves only; there is so much to be done. And if I am often discontented with myself for the futility of my dreams, for sitting here a mere spectator, as it were, of struggles that I long to share, yet know not how, greater still is my impatience at the sight of one wasting his days in mere speculation, who, having all the strength, the manhood, that I lack, might leap into the very thick of the fight, Truth's warrior.

He tells me that he has written a great deal, and has promised to bring me a

bundle of poems to read at my leisure. "You must understand," said he, "that you will be the only one to whom I ever showed them." I feel very proud.

To revert to what I said above, I believe, too, that it is very bad for any man not to have a fixed occupation; however great his natural energy may be, it either relaxes with time, or expends itself uselessly. The mere thinker often ends by hovering on the confines of lunacy.

Good-bye, dear love.

Your EMILIA.

Letter XIX.

Graysmill, November 30th.

I write to you very soon, partly because of your letter that crossed mine, but principally because I feel that I must write you a few words before I go to sleep. I have just gone through Gabriel's poems, and am beside myself with wonder. Constance, the creature is a genius. I marvel at my happiness, that I should have touched his life. No, I'll not write; I feel that, if I do, I shall write bosh. Good-night; I hope you are sleeping fast at this moment,—and he too.

December 1st.

We had a walk this afternoon. He looks pale, poor dear! he has had a cold.

How it hurts to see ill-health on a face that one loves!

We had a great altercation about his poems. I could not speak of them when I put the manuscript into his hands; any words I might have used must have sounded fulsome flattery. But later on, I asked: —

"Have you thought of a publisher for your verse?"

He shook his head and made a face at me.

"You must certainly publish those poems," I said; "you surely know that they are unusually beautiful, and that you have no right to keep them to yourself."

"Dear Emilia," he answered, "I like to hear this from you, but you are mistaken. My poems are not so remarkable as you imagine; you are too near a friend to be a fair judge. They are intensely subjective, — that is, by the way, one of

their faults; they reflect me; therefore you, who know me well and care for me, find them sympathetic. That's the whole of the tale."

"If I cared for you ten times more than I do," said I then, "I should not be quite so blind as you suppose. But, if you doubt my judgment, ask some one else, or compare the poems yourself with other verse."

"Never!" he said. "How can you even suggest such a thing? Look here, Emilia. A man has an ideal, a glimpse of something glittering up there in highest Heaven; he tries to shape his vision into words. When he afterwards turns to his work coldly, critically, how shall he judge? He must take measure by the height of the ideal, not by the achievement of another, even if that other be nearer Heaven than himself."

I found this very fine and true, yet

selfish. Had he ever climbed less high than he wished, he might at least stand forth, and showing where he stood, stretch out a hand to others.

"No," he replied again, "no, I am too weak myself to help others. Dear girl, don't you see that those things were written with the blood of my heart? Cold men would read them, tear them to pieces. Emilia! they would review me!"

He said this with a sort of yell of despair. I saw that he was in a perfectly impossible mood, so I left him in peace. We talked of you afterwards, and he sent you his love. Was that bold or not? If you don't care for the gift, send it back to me. I am very hungry for that same food.

EMILIA.

Letter XX.

December 6th.

The snow is on the ground; 'tis a beautiful white world. Yet to-day has been a dull day. I had my lesson yesterday. I spent the whole of this afternoon preparing a list of Christmas charities, in which Aunt Caroline and Ida Seymour helped me, good souls. I can think of nothing but flannel this evening. That is a lie, by the way; I almost wish it were not. Yesterday Gabriel and I had an adventure. I was walking part of the way back with him and Jane Norton, who had been taking tea with my old ladies, and as we went past a cottage, just off the lane, we heard fearful screams. Gabriel sprang in, I following, and there we found a

woman beating a little girl with a broom. Gabriel's eyes were like fire; he caught the child in one hand, the broom in the other; I thought he meant to bring it down on the woman's back. We stayed there some time, he lecturing the mother, I consoling the poor mite. She was wretchedly clad; I shall bring her some clothes to-morrow.

I am dull. I meant to write you a long letter, but somehow I can't. Farewell until to-morrow.

December 13th.

What will you be thinking of me? Your silence is almost more unbearable than a letter of reproach would be; I had not realised until I found the above fragment in my desk just now, how miserably long it is since last I wrote to you. Write to me, my dearest; I need to feel your love. I think I am not very well just now; you must forgive me, yet don't

be anxious on my account. I don't feel very well, that's all; there is nothing the matter with me. Neither is there anything to tell you; all goes on as usual. Gabriel is well.

Oh, my pretty Constance, I cannot write! I shall send off this miserable scrap, and write again very soon.

Your poor fool,

EMILIA.

Letter XXI.

December 18th.

Thank Heaven that you are here, in the world; I should die if you were not. Let me think, where shall I begin? At the end; that is nearest. I have only just come upstairs; I have been shaking in the dark. They are beasts; I hate them all. I was sitting playing cribbage with grandmamma after supper, when Uncle George was announced. He wanted to speak to me, he said. I took him into the breakfast room, and there he told me in a fat pompous voice that I — O Dio, my blood still burns to think of it, and the way in which he said it — that I was getting myself talked about in the neighbourhood; that probably I didn't know, owing

to my foreign education, that it wasn't the thing here in England to let oneself be seen constantly alone in the company of a young man; that he thought it his duty, etc., etc.

"Thank you," said I,—my very skin felt tight,—"I see that I must be more underhand in my actions, and contrive to see my friends entirely on the sly."

"Excuse me, my dear niece," interrupted Uncle George, "but I feel it my duty to fill a father's place by you. It isn't as if you could possibly marry this young Norton; he hasn't a penny; and as it is now some time since first the rumour of your very careless behaviour reached my ears, I have been able to make full inquiries into the matter. His antecedents, to say no more ——"

Constance, did you ever hear of such infamy. I believe I grew perfectly green; Heaven knows what I said, but you have

seen me lose my temper once! When I mastered myself, Uncle George was standing by the door, looking considerably startled; I was on a chair, shaking from head to foot. After a moment's silence I said:

"I beg your pardon for losing my self-control as I did just now; I am very sorry, but you have done me a great wrong. I know you meant it for the best; so we will say no more about it. I only hope that you will leave me and my friends alone in future. I am twenty-six and my own mistress, and I care for my good name every whit as much as you do."

Then he left me, and I came upstairs.

So now they have done it! They have touched my paradise with their dirty fingers. O Constance! how is it to be borne? My one comfort is that Gabriel knows nobody, hears nothing; if such talk were to reach his ears, I should kill myself.

Yet perhaps it is just as well that this blow has come to me. It has given me the shock I needed. I have made up my mind to keep away from Gabriel as long as I can; it is best so. Christmas charities, etc., will serve as a sufficient excuse.

Constance, I am going to tell you all; I trust so to your understanding and your love. It seems strange, perhaps, to speak as I am about to speak; I shall burst if I don't. It is this: I love him, I love him horribly, horribly; I cannot bear it. Why must one do this? Why couldn't it last, our white friendship? On his side it might; he loves me, I know, but only as I loved him at first. He loves me very much. I am grown in a way indispensable to him, but his love makes him content; it will not kill him. Mine is grown unbearable.

Perhaps I should have told you this before, yet I have not known it very long.

I knew some time ago that all my joy is in him; he has been for many weeks the goal of my eyes, the centre of my thought; the time I spent away from him was dead time; when I was with him I was flooded in peace. But all this was joy, not pain. That came later; the time I spent away from him was no longer dead, it was living longing.

One day, about a week ago, I had forgotten him (I forget how I managed that!), but suddenly the thought of him returned to me. I felt a sudden sharp pain at my heart, a sort of aching that tingled through me to my very finger-tips. I knew then how it was with me.

Next day I did not go to meet him in the wood as I had promised; I went straight to the cottage; I feared myself. When he returned at tea-time, he came up to me and took my hand with more friendship than of wont.

"Oh, Emilia!" he cried, "why have you failed me? I have been so anxious; I feared you were ill."

He said this as a brother might have said it; he looked me full in the face as serenely as the stars at night. I looked back at him; his calm fell upon me, and I laughed at myself for my fears. I got better after that, yet not well; I was never at ease. To-day we were together very long; I was perfectly happy; we had spoken of beautiful things, calmly, in great peace. But at parting he forgot to let my hand go; he held it so long that I had time to feel his, and my blood bounded through me in great waves. I still think he must have felt it; if he did, I can never look at him again.

I hate myself for loving him so; I hate myself that I suffer through him; the fault seems his, being entirely mine.

And now I wish that I had never seen

him, that all these days of joy were wiped out of my life; for the joy is turned to misery and pain, and for this there can be no cure. If he grew to love me as I do him, it would be unearthly; such happiness is not for this world. I think that if he loved me, one of us would surely die. This is the world, O Constance! Bursts of beauty, bursts of bliss, but none to live untouched, none to endure.

I have been happy; I should not groan.

Write to me, dear.

Your EMILIA.

Letter XXII.

Graysmill, December 29th.

You must hear from me once again this year, my Constance. Oh, dearest, dearest, it has only come to me of late, when my love for you has shone dimly compared to another, what it is worth to me, your love. I cannot express myself; I am all entangled, hopeless. But what I mean is this: you have been one long joy to me, a sun that has had no setting. I would I were as I used to be, untouched by the knowledge that love can be hard pain. My sweet dear, you were enough; why have I learned this bitter knowledge? Oh, how I laugh of a night, thinking of myself six months ago, thinking of what I then mistook for love!

Eleven days since I saw him. I have been conscious of every hour. We were busy here; there is much to do at Christmas time. I wrote to him that I could take no more lessons nor even walk with him for the present, as I must devote myself entirely to the Christmas work, and he has written to me twice. He would have me think that he sits there forlorn, cursing Yule-tide and charity; he says in the letter I received this morning, that it is time my charity were turned in his direction. I think I shall go to the cottage this afternoon; there is an end to all endurance. Or shall I wait until New Year's day? Perhaps that were best. I like to try my strength, to see how much can be borne.

I can write no more now; I must try to get through a few other letters. I have sent no cards to Florence. What a worm I am!

Your words of love have helped me through these days; I carry the three dear letters, along with his, in my pocket.

Good-bye, dearest; blessings upon you. I think I shall set forth in search of you very soon. May the New Year be kind to us all!

Yours in deepest love,

EMILIA.

Letter XXIII.

Graysmill, January 1st.

My pretty sweet, I have had much happiness to-day. First of all, a letter from you at breakfast, and one from Gabriel, then, sunshine all the morning, and all the morning a song in my heart; to-day I shall see him!

I set off immediately after early dinner, and walked across the Common to the Thatched Cottage. I cannot tell you what it was to me to catch sight of the chimney and the purling smoke again; I had to stand still and wait a while, my heart thumped so. (A fool, eh?) I crept noiselessly into the house, and through the hall, then stealthily opened the study door. There he sat on the ground by the

fire, with his back to me, reading, of course.

"What a careless person!" said I, softly; "he'll blind himself one of these days."

Up he jumped.

"Emilia!" he cried, "dear Emilia!" and, catching me by both wrists, swung my arms up and down and to and fro.

"You faithless thing," said he, "you false friend, I hate you!"

Here Richard Norton ran in from the kitchen, with the teapot in his hand, followed by Jane; they both covered me with welcomes and reproaches. I was very happy, I assure you. We went into the kitchen and had early tea, talking all the while and all together. Gabriel was in one of his impish moods, and made me laugh till I cried. The first thing I thought, when I had time to think, was that I had been a fool to keep away so

long and allow myself to grow sentimental; that it was altogether much more healthful for me to be in his dear company.

I came home in a much better frame of mind, although Gabriel insisted on walking nearly as far as Graysmill with me, and said as we parted:

"You must never again leave me for so long, Emilia; I am lost without you, I am, indeed."

I turned from him, half wishing he had not said this, feeling a little giddy, a little less strong; but, as I ran along, something hit me on the shoulder. I looked behind me, and there he stood, like an imp of mischief, pelting me with pine-cones, which it seems he had collected in his pocket for that purpose. So I had to laugh, and was cured again.

The year has at least begun well.

Adieu, my sweetest. Things are often

not so bad as we imagine. With this truism I take my leave of you.

Your EMILIA.

I think I forgot to send a New Year's wish to Mrs. Rayner. For you, my love, again all the good that this world holds. May it rain upon you in ceaseless showers!

Letter XXIV.

Graysmill, January 15th.

I have grown unutterably selfish. I only remembered this morning that you had asked me to send you those books. To think that a day should have come when I could forget to do something you had asked me! I have seen to it, with much penitence. Forgive me!

Your Emilia is a miserable specimen; she despises herself very much. I go up and down all day like something that has lost its balance, neither have I any. One hour I am absolutely happy; the next I am biting the dust. One day I say to myself, I will never walk or talk or read or sit alone with him again, — and perhaps for that one day I keep my word.

But then, the next, I do all I meant not to do, I pine for it till I bring it about. And when I have sat beside him a little while, doing my lessons, the Greek loses its hold of my poor brain, my head swims, I make a blunder; then he laughs and says he cannot understand how such an apparently clever woman can have such a sieve for a brain. I laugh, and tell him he's unmannerly. Then we both laugh, and I am well until I am ill again.

It is only since I knew Gabriel that I know how to laugh. I don't mean to say that I never laughed before. Do you remember how we sometimes screamed up in my room at Florence? I remember, too, as a child, going into wild fits of laughter, and mamma and I having to wipe each other's eyes. But these days were few and far between. I have learned to laugh with my years. Very fine wit is lost upon me, and I have certainly no

native humour of my own; but I do know how to laugh about nothing at all, how to make merry over the thorns of life! Laughter was not meant for the joyful; it was made for us, the sombre of soul, to save our heart-strings here and there; like the song of a lark in the sky, to bid us lift our eyes from the dust of the road.

Sometimes, when I have been laughing very much, and then remember my pain, I see the vision of a child that dances on a grave-mound in the sun.

Sweet, I'll go on to-morrow.

January 20th.

I distinguished myself to-day! It came on to pour while I was at the Cottage, and, in spite of a certain caution that has crept into my actions of late, I stayed there the whole afternoon.

Jane was actually making herself a new dress, so I offered to help her, and we

sewed by lamplight at the kitchen table, it being a very dark afternoon. Gabriel joined us after a while; he thought we looked so cosy that he brought his books and sat at the table too, just opposite me.

You have never really loved any man, you, so perhaps you don't know what it is to be afraid of your own eyes, because you feel that every time they rest on that thing you love, your poor heart runs and looks out of window.

I seldom look at Gabriel now, — I dare not. But there he sat opposite me, poring over his book. Jane was bent over her sewing. I forgot her, and I forgot my work too; it slipped from my fingers and fell into my lap. Suddenly he raised his head, — it seemed as if all the blood in my body rushed to my face; he had caught me all unguarded; what he might not know was laid bare before him. With a dull, wide gaze he stared at me, then

bent over his book again; he had not seen me; he had merely looked up to get a better view, as it were, of something he had in mind.

Then I, too, bent my head low, for hot tears stood in my silly eyes, and, to my surprise, I felt a soft hand tuck my hair behind my ears, caressingly. I looked up and saw a world of pity in Jane Norton's face. When presently Gabriel left the room to fetch another volume, I said:

"Jane, he must never know it."

"My child," she answered, speaking as softly as I had done, "there is no fear that he should learn it from *me*."

"From me, then?" asked I; "is it so plain?"

"You are as pale as the table," she said. "Take care of yourself, Em,—don't be unhappy, all's well."

Just then Gabriel came in, and I left

soon after. You see what an enemy I am to myself.

Good night, dearest; I am your

EMILIA.

Letter XXV.

Graysmill, January 29th.

It is so easy to imagine the bright side of things when one is too far away to see the truth. Silly Constance, cruel Constance, what is the use of sending me such words of false hope? It does not follow, because you love me best of all the world, that another should do likewise. No, no; you know nothing at all about it, and yet in spite of all reason, I catch at every straw you send drifting towards me. Once and for all, of course he loves me, but it stands just so. He loves me too well in one way to love me in another. If he loved me less, he might love me more. I have said all this to Jane. She declares that the only reason why he is not in love

with me is that an obstacle stands in the way which has stood in the way all along, and which he has never dreamed of surmounting. She means my accursed money. I told her she was completely mistaken; that love, inevitable love, knows nothing of obstacles; besides, this could not be an obstacle between him and me, — he is too unworldly to be the slave of such prejudice. If I thought she was right, who knows but what I should send my money spinning into the lap of Charity, and let that lady dispense it as indiscriminately and wastefully as she pleases. No, no; the fault lies in another direction. There has been a little mistake somewhere; I am not the lost half of his soul, for all that he is mine.

Little Constance, I think now that perhaps you were right when you said that I was not altogether a woman. I am certainly not made as a woman should be.

A woman may return love, but she must never dare to give it. I have been guilty of this folly, and now, what is to become of me?

We are such fools, we women. When a man loves, he is all that he was, plus love; when we love, we throw ourselves headlong into the flood, and are nothing that we were.

So now you know all about it, and can prepare yourself for a gay companion. I have made up my mind to leave England, and join you in Vienna. No, it must be Italy; you must leave Vienna and come towards me.

You cannot see that between the last sentence and this there is a pause of ten minutes. It is all very well for me to talk of leaving Graysmill; I do talk of it, the words are words, but I don't understand them. I cannot leave; I ought to, —yet, Constance, I cannot leave him!

Write, you, and tell me where we shall meet; not in Florence, I could not bear that. And yet, perhaps, yes, in Florence. It will have to be, and I shall not realise that I have left him until I am with you again. There is comfort in that thought. One can do anything, after all, with a little determination, can't one, Constantia? Not that you can judge, you who never had any. Perhaps I have none myself, who knows? I have so deceived myself in loving Gabriel, and laid bare such great and unknown weakness in my own bosom, that all the world is upside down for me, and I can find my way no longer.

Write and tell me soon where we shall meet.

Your EMILIA.

Letter XXVI.

Graysmill, February 7th.

So it's all settled. You are very good to me, my pretty Constance. Now I say to myself hourly, "In sixteen days I shall see her," and oh, believe me, I am glad! I think I am beginning to lose my head, that I am fit for all folly. We walked together yesterday; we were not very talkative. In the lane, when we were coming home, a man on a bicycle turned sharply round the corner, and I was lost in thought, so that I was caught unawares, and in fact knew nothing of the matter until I felt myself pulled aside by Gabriel. I thought he would let go my arm, but he did not, and for the few yards of road that remained I could not see out of my

eyes. I said to myself, "He is holding my arm, — perhaps he loves me." I was a fool; of course, it meant nothing; and I am certain, too, that it was imagination on my part led me to believe he looked differently at me when he said good-bye.

That is what frightens me. Of course, it was pure self-delusion; but, if I am going to begin that sort of folly, it is high time to come away. Indeed, the folly of it. Besides, I suppose I ought to feel ashamed. I am sure he knows now quite well that I love him, and perhaps that is why he looked strangely at me when he said good-bye. But I don't want his pity; O God forbid! Nor his, nor anybody's. Do you hear? Never pity me, Constance.

Your little

EMILIA.

LETTER XXVII.

February 12th.

COULD you meet me a little sooner, perhaps, and not wait until the twenty-third? I must leave Graysmill at once. I shall go to the Cottage to-morrow afternoon, and tell them. I shall tell the others to-night, and on Monday I shall leave Graysmill forever. If you think you cannot reach Florence by Wednesday or Thursday, never mind, you will join me as soon as you can; only send me a telegram. I can go and stay with Marianna until you come.

I can bear it no longer! The world holds but one thought; the day and the night are lost in the constant reiteration of every word he ever said to me, in the

resuscitation of every glance, every touch. And, poring over these in my memory, I try to read between the lines the words that are not there, to read "I love you."

Oh, I am very weak, yet, believe me, it is all against my will. I have fought this folly, I despise myself utterly, and yet now I am swept away by the flood, I can struggle no more. I shall die of this, or run mad.

I met him out to-day. We had not arranged to meet; but, as I went out at the blue door, there he stood. We went a little way together; then I left him; it was unbearable. It was so beautiful once to be with him, when we could talk freely of all that is best and noblest in life. I cannot talk to him now, sometimes I cannot even hear what he says to me. I cannot see the sky, the broad white earth; I see him only. I cannot hear the life-sounds about me; I only hear his footfall

in the snow. It is all pain, all dreadful pain, dreadful, unbearable longing.

Why can't I put an end to all this? Why can't I go to him and say, I love you, tell me the truth? I know it,— the truth,— he does not love me; and yet, until I hear his lips say it, a false hope that reason cannot kill will linger on in my heart,— linger on, I know it, even when I have placed time and space between him and me.

Only one life, and there we stand, two spirits under the sky, two that believe in Truth and Freedom, parted by insincerity. The vile weed has crept up around us; we are parted by falsehood, even we. Good night. Perhaps I shall not write again. I shall send you a telegram before I start, on Monday.

Come to me, dear, as soon as you can.

EMILIA.

Letter XXVIII.

February 13th.

Dearest, I have had a strange, wonderful dream. To-morrow morning, when I awake, I shall find it was not true. Shall I tell it you?

I handle it as some frail treasure that I fear to touch. I keep wondering on which side to turn it, so that, when I hold it up, you may see it shine. The earth is very beautiful to-night; from my window I see the moon and a mighty host of glittering worlds, — even Emilia is beautiful to-night! I went to the glass just now, to look upon the face of happiness, and, instead of myself I saw — Oh, but why say all this? Why not tell you?

I cannot; words are weak, but I think you can feel it, Constance. Oh, sweetest, I think you can, I think you know. I am half mad to-night; that is why I write so queerly. But now I will set it down. I wonder what it looks like, written down. I shall write it very neatly; it will look pretty. Gabriel loves me. Do you see? Gabriel loves me. I think I shall write it again, — Gabriel loves me. I never wrote anything that pleased me so well, and my heart sings it within me unceasingly. Oh, of course it is not true; it is just a dream. I think this is how the dream went.

I sat in the study at the Thatched Cottage; we were all four there; I had not spoken for a while; the thing I had to say weighed me down. I said it suddenly, "I am going back to Florence; I shall leave Graysmill on Monday."

Richard Norton cried, "What?" and

Jane cried, "Emilia!" It was only Gabriel that said nothing.

He sprang up, and looked at me in silence. Thank Heaven, my back was to the window, for I could not take my eyes away from his. I thought he grew a little pale; I even thought his lips moved a little. Then he spoke.

"No, no; who said that? We cannot spare you. Emilia, Emilia, you must never leave us!"

That is how the dream goes. I put my head down on the table.

"God knows," I said, "I do not want to leave you."

There was a long silence; I sat there bowed, struggling with my tears; I think I heard footsteps and a closing door. Then a hand was laid upon my shoulder, —I knew whose hand it was, and I shook beneath it.

I only know one thing more that I can

tell you. I heard a voice. It was not a loud voice, but it rang through the darkness; it swept the world away.

"Emilia!" it said, "Emilia, you must not leave us! Stay with me, — I love you!"

And then some cloud fell upon us.

Good night, dear, good night.

Letter XXIX.

THE THATCHED COTTAGE, February 19th.

GABRIEL and I are sitting in the study; we have your letter before us. These few lines are to thank you, if we can, for your most precious words. Now nothing fails us.

Your most loving, grateful,

EMILIA FLETCHER.

Your servant,

GABRIEL NORTON.

P. S. The blot is Gabriel's.

P. S. 2. In answer to yours. Gabriel is not so inconsistent as you suppose, nor is Emilia. We have made a provision to which you, Constance Norris, shall bear witness. Namely this: that, in accordance with the absolute Sincerity and

Truthfulness which we believe to be not only possible, but necessary to the Conduct of a Noble Life, we have solemnly promised each other to confess the truth, should we at any future period — through altered Love or other causes — consider Mutual Life inconsistent with perfect Honesty.

There! We have worded that beautifully, I think, although Gabriel insists that "Mutual Life" is an incorrect expression. I don't care; it says what I mean. Needless to add that, in our case, such a prevision is as good as superfluous, but we feel bound to act up to our principles!

Letter XXX.

Graysmill, February 19th.

Beloved, we wrote you a few lines together this afternoon, but I must write again, I alone, to thank you for your letter and tell you all you ask to know. Yet, indeed, I know not what to tell you. I am happy; the sun is in my heart. I tried to write to you before, but the words failed me; besides — my own self is a stranger to me. This marvel of marvels, a perfectly happy woman, has nothing in common with Emilia Fletcher, as you and I have known her.

I believe that Lethe was Joy's well. The past has floated from me like a bank of mist, I stand flooded in light. And if I look behind me I see nothing. Two

phantoms merely,— my love for my mother, my love for you,— all else is gone. Where are they now, the clouds that pressed so close upon me? Three words, and lo! the sky is clear. I have even forgotten what it felt like to stand there in the gloom with breaking heart.

We have made no plans yet; that is to say, we have made so many that choice between them is impossible. Still, although we build fresh castles in the air each time we meet, they all float towards Italy, in the springtime, halting a while where Constance is. If, indeed, there be a cloud remaining in my heaven, it is that you two, my soul's monarchs, know each other only through the medium of my love. My eyes long to hold you both; I want to walk in the body, as I do in the spirit, clasping a hand of each.

And to think that she is dead! Shall I tell you something very strange, almost

inconceivable? I cannot help feeling as if she knew. Surely, Death cannot wholly part a mother from her child.

Good night, my dear little one.

EMILIA.

Letter XXXI.

Graysmill, February 24th.

I showed some parts of your letter to Gabriel, and we laughed very much. What a bird she is, my Constance! He is ever so much taller than I. We compared our height with the utmost care, this morning, for your especial benefit. Do you remember — what should I do to you, by the way, if you didn't? — that when your head is on my shoulder, my chin just makes a little roof for your curls, so that you always used to say, "How nicely we fit!" Well, there is just about the same difference between Gabriel and me, as between me and you. I call that very nice.

Now, as to the rest of the world. My

two old dears are very sweet to me, and to Gabriel also. Indeed, every one is pleasant to us, and if it does come to my ears that I am looked upon by Graysmill generally in the light of a harmless lunatic, why, what of that? I take joy in the thought that none but myself knows the value of the treasure that is mine. One good soul said to me yesterday: "We think it very nice of you, very nice and modest. Such a rich young lady as you are, you might have had any one you pleased!"

We went on Sunday to pay a formal visit to Uncle George. That was a terrible ordeal, but we got some fun out of it.

I went to fetch Gabriel, for Uncle George lives just beyond Miltonhoe. I found him in the study, sitting with his head in his hands, a picture of misery.

"Emilia," said he, "you dare not be so cruel as to expect this of me. I can-

not go and see your uncle, indeed, I cannot."

"You must," said I; "I am very good to you on the whole; this is the only call I expect you to pay, but this one must be. Up with you, and make yourself look respectable."

So off he went, with despair in his eye, and Jane and I waited for him in the kitchen. At the end of half an hour he reappeared. He had merely put on a horrible black coat; for the rest, I could see no improvement.

There he stood, without hat or gloves.

"I am ready," said he.

"You imp!" I cried; "you've been playing about! What have you been at all this time? Do you suppose I can present such a scarecrow to my relations?"

"Emilia," answered the poor dear, very solemnly, "I have washed!"

There was nothing for it but to make him fetch the clothes-brush, and other implements of torture. Jane and I marched him out into the hall, and there we prepared the victim. We brushed his clothes, and straightened his necktie. Even Richard Norton was so excited by the scene that he fetched the blacking-bottle and polished Gabriel's boots, whilst Jane acted hairdresser and I held him down by both hands. This in the midst of so much laughter that the tears stood in our eyes.

When at last we turned him round for inspection, smooth-haired and stiff with the consciousness of his respectability, I could have wept at my own handiwork.

"You poor dear!" I cried. "Oh, Jane, doesn't he look horrible!"

But Gabriel went into the parlour to look at himself in the mirror, and declared that he pleased himself mightily.

The visit itself was comparatively uneventful. They have asked us to dine next Friday, but I doubt whether we shall go. Gabriel suggests that we should get married at once and fly from such terrors.

Good-bye now, my sweet one.

Yours more than ever, in spite of all,

EMILIA.

Letter XXXII.

Graysmill, March 3d.

I don't know how it comes, but it is a positive effort to me to write a letter, even to you. If I had not been reminded by the calendar that a new month is already on the growth, I should not perhaps have written to-day.

There is nothing to tell you, I am too happy; and how it comes I know not, but joy is difficult to express. Perhaps because it is so rare that we have hardly learned its language.

And yet, how soon one gets accustomed to the greatest marvels! At first, I was filled with doubt and wonder at the miracle that had transformed me; now, I take it all as a matter of course. That's the

worst of it; a clay-fed mortal is lifted to Elysium and forgets at the end of a week that he ever tasted coarser food than ambrosia! I am spoilt for life; if ever any grief falls upon me in the future, I shall be beaten to earth.

The other night, as I lay in bed, there came to me, for the first time in my remembrance, that horror of death of which you sometimes spoke to me. I thought to myself: I shall lie thus in the dark, only this heart will be still, this blood will be cold, and there will be no dawn for me,—yet the world will spin on as before, and those who loved me will smile again. I feared death for the first time, because, for the first time, life is dear to me. It is the outcome of my great content; I cling to my happiness, and Death is my only enemy, the only power that could knock this cup of bliss out of my hands. Oh, Constance, to die

before one has drunk that full measure, how horrible!

Another shadow there is that flits from time to time across my eyes. Why, if such content can be, is it not universal? Why is not every face I meet stamped with a similar joy? I lay awake long last night, thinking of you. I do not look upon you as actually unhappy, that is not in your nature, you sunbeam, yet you lack in your dear life the best light, that of another's shedding. Now that I know what it is to be loved, I look upon the blankness of your existence with dismay.

No more to-day, but I shall write again soon, I promise.

Yours ever and always,

EMILIA.

Letter XXXIII.

Graysmill, March 5th.

Thank you, sweet one, for the eight dear pages. I feel ashamed of the scrap I sent you the day before yesterday. I never felt so lazy in my life as I feel now. One thing is certain, happiness is not altogether good. Blake says somewhere, "Damn braces, bless relaxes." Perhaps he was right.

I am losing myself completely. Every time I part from him I feel that he has taken yet a little more of me away. He absorbs me, heart and soul. I do not complain. I feel a little ashamed of myself from time to time, when I realise how callous I have become to everything else, when, no matter what book I take

down from the shelf, I find I cannot read half a page connectedly; otherwise I am perfectly content that it should be so. Impersonal things — Nature, Music — have perhaps strengthened their hold on me; because they flatter my selfishness, so to speak, they are always in tune with my heart. Gabriel more than makes up for my degeneracy; of course that should be, seeing that he has taken unto himself all my intellectual faculties!

He is writing a simply astounding poem; he reads it to me as it grows. I tell him he is much more in love with it than with me! When we are out, he falls into deep dreams; sometimes, when they are of the kind that words can fetter, he brings them within my reach, and then we float together into the realms of air.

But, although we are hand in hand, I know that he has sight of things I cannot see, hears voices I cannot hear; I only

clearly see one vision, him; hear but one voice, my own, that says, I love you.

Shall I tell you something? I would not tell him for the world; he would deny it; he would not understand; but you I will tell. It is this: I love him more than he loves me, and in that thought I find content. When two love, one must love more than the other, and blessed is he who loves best. I think that if I felt his love o'ershadowed mine, I should be miserable, I should have some sensation of unpayable debt. As it stands, he does not know he is my debtor; only I know it, and I delight in the knowledge. Let him love me and love me, he will never love me enough; on the other hand, I yearn so for his love that all he gives me I cherish and am grateful for; by this means, whether he love me much or little, I shall always be satisfied.

You must not suppose, because of what

I say, that he does not love me intensely; my love is unmatchable, that is all. He tells me every day that he could not live without me, and, indeed, it is true. He relies upon me entirely, calls upon my care incessantly; and very sweet it is to feel that the supreme God of my Heaven is as a child in my arms. Ah, I am happy, the world is good, and now the spring is coming. We rejoice in the growth of the year; Gabriel longs for the first primrose. He is so hard at work that I think it unlikely we shall get married before the end of April; the poem is writing itself at present; it would be a sin to interfere with its progress. I think, too, that if he can possibly finish it, he will be able to go away with a greater content upon him, with the satisfaction that only achievement brings. It is, in fact, very long since he last completed anything.

And then I shall take him away, I, in his full content, to the sunshine, to the land of dreams.

There are still some things I can hardly realise.

Good-bye, dearest.

EMILIA.

Letter XXXIV.

Graysmill, March 20th.

My beloved Constance, I am glad your letter of this morning has made me a little unhappy; I have been a selfish brute, thinking of none but myself, and him. I little thought, whilst I lay basking in the sun, that you stood there shrouded in densest fog. I wish I had written every day, you poor sweet!

But now I have evolved a plan, and Gabriel thinks with me that it is a good one. You will find me rather prosaic, yet indeed, sweetheart, I think you cannot be well; these doleful dumps have nothing in common with your nature. You are not well, you have no friend to cheer you, and this melancholy is the result.

Come to us! Gabriel and I are the most undecided beings in creation; ten days ago he threw up his poem in disgust; there was nothing for it but to get married at once and start for Italy. A few days later, inspiration set in, and now he is again so deep in his verse that we shall stay here until the poem is finished. Come to us! You will find us excellent company. Yes, dearest, you must do this; who knows when we may be together again? Besides, there would be a blank in your knowledge of my life, had you never seen me in this home, grown dear to me beyond all expectation, through my great happiness. Besides, I want you and Gabriel to know each other.

Mrs. Rayner — if you *must* bring her — will find enough society at Graysmill to keep her busy for a month or two; I think she would get on splendidly with Uncle George and his people.

You and I, my darling, will be happy together as of old. I have told grandmamma and Aunt Caroline that I have invited the pretty friend whose photographs they admire so much, to come and stay with me; they ask me to add their importunities to mine.

Come, dearest, and without delay, for your own sake and mine. Come, and let us be happy together whilst I am still your lover of old years.

EMILIA.

Answer immediately, will you, Mrs. Norris?

Letter XXXV.

Graysmill, March 26th.

You are the best friend that ever lived! I am quite restless with impatience, so is Gabriel, so are my old ones. And who most of all? Oh! little white face, how I long to hold you in my hands again, and what warmth of love and happiness I long to pour into your heart!

I shall not scold you, because you are not well, but what do you mean by saying that you will come, "although of course we shall never see each other"? Dear silly, do you imagine that I spend the whole day with that creature you pretend to be so jealous of?

Not a bit of it! Sometimes, just by way of a little salutary training in renunci-

ation, we don't even meet every day. No, the bulk of my time will be yours and mine; we will sit up here in my room, beneath my mother's portrait; we will make the old days live again, weld the old and the new into one. Then, Gabriel and I will take you with us for walks fitting a fairy, in the woods; how you will love them! The trees are misty already with the promise of leaves, and all manner of sweet things are beginning to pierce the ground. How we shall spoil you, we two!

So you are coming,—I can hardly believe it. Never say again that I shall forget you. Let me remind you, Madam, if all else fail to convince you, that we two are women, and that there is one tender love, one yearning, which can only be betwixt woman and woman.

There is something infinitely pathetic in this truth; a man may be the dearest, the nearest he can never be.

But I must bless and leave thee. I have promised to meet Gabriel at the Post-office.

My last letter. No need to write again. Oh, Constantia, can it be true?

Yours in all truth,

EMILIA.

THE JOURNAL.

THE JOURNAL.

June 3d, at evening. — I am weak, very weak. I never could carry either joy or trouble pent up in my heart.

It has seemed sometimes of late that I must be stifled by the thing that troubles me. Yet it is a trifling thing; nothing, I am sure, but a foolish, wicked fear, a little disease within myself. If mamma were here, I should just go and lay my head on her knees, and tell her everything. Then she would stroke my eyes and bid me see reason, and all would be well. O my little mother, O great and dear one, why did you leave your child?

I remembered just now that it used to help me once to write things down. That

is what I must do. I will put it away from me; perhaps, too, it will look so silly in solemn ink that I shall laugh at it instead of screaming, as I did just now with my face on the pillow. And now that it comes to the point, I am ashamed of saying it. My love is making me mad; was there ever such a fool? I have been too happy, that is the whole truth — far too happy. Poor things, we carry grief well enough, cold grief; but hot joy cracks the frail vessel.

I have had a wonderful spring, with my two dearests; Constance sweeter than ever she was, even during her long illness giving some worth to the hours I might not spend with him, and he ever near. Then, when we three were together, we were happy, too. How silly of me to write "were"; they are still there, the summer days are long, I love them so well, they hold me so dear.

I have not written it. No matter, I feel better; I already begin to laugh at myself.

June 4th. — Their eyes met once at supper, only once, and they did not look at each other when they said good night. Which means most, to look or not to look? I cannot read clearly yet. And one can certainly twice ask the same person to pass the salt without its meaning anything. This is very ugly in me; my better self is filled with sorrow. Surely it must be in every one's power to quell the visions of the inmost eye when they rise sinfully, to close their ears against such whisperings as now I listen to.

I must fight this. Doubt is Love's murderer.

June 6th. — Constance should not have said that; there was no need. Why have I come upstairs and left them together? I am raving mad. And now to cry like

a baby! I have cried every day for five days; this is monstrous! I think that if some one came and whipped me, I might feel better. This is some sickness, surely; relaxed nerves, quick blood. I shall write it all down carefully, calling on what sense I have left to be judge. Of course the judge will laugh. But first I will wash my face.

In the beginning, Constance said she was not sure she liked him. Let me remember his first words about her, the day after her arrival. I brought him into the drawing-room, and put his hand into hers, saying, "Here is your friend."

He was very shy, and hardly looked at her. "We are meeting under inauspicious circumstances, Mrs. Norris," said he. "We have heard so much about each other that I, at least, cannot reconcile the strangeness of your person with the intimate affection I have so long had for you in my thoughts."

Constance laughed.

"It *is* funny, isn't it?" said she. "I know what you mean. I thought I knew you quite well, and you're not at all the sort of person I thought you were."

Gabriel did not stay long; I went with him to the door when he left, and he said:

"She is prettier than her photograph. I like her, Emilia." I was so glad.

Constance soon began to take an interest in him; he amused her.

"He is the queerest creature I ever saw," she said; "I can't set eyes on him without laughing; he is too comic."

Then she fell ill, poor love! They did not meet for a long time. And every day, when Gabriel came to fetch me for my walk, he only asked after her as he should have asked after my dearest friend. Of course, when she got better and he sat with us daily to help me to amuse her,

they were thrown more together. It was a great joy to me to see how well they got on.

Then she began to tease him. They never talked very much, for all that. When I come to think of it, it was early last month that Constance began to say, "How is your friend this morning?" or "I haven't seen Gabriel for two days; I miss him; he makes me laugh." But I did not notice it then.

What? Is this all I have to say? It is too ridiculous! Of course she likes him; one cannot come near him without some love. Besides, she would like him for my sake. It is all so natural. He, too, did not often speak of her, does not often speak of her. It is natural, knowing how I love her, that he should feel at ease with my Constance. Nor could I have wished it to be otherwise.

Now let me think when I was first taken

with this mad fit. It was last Thursday week; we were all three in the wood; it was one of my bad days, when I love him unto pain; it hurt me that he lagged behind, I wanted him near. And I twice saw Constance turn to look after him; I turned, too,— they smiled at each other. When he drew up, the path was wider; it was the first time, I think, that instead of coming to my side, or placing himself between us, he went round to Constance.

I noticed it, I felt it; there spread a quick pain through my whole being. It was silly, perhaps, but I walked round behind him, and slipped my hand through his arm.

"Are you tired, my Emilia?" he asked; but I answered:

"No, dear; I only wanted to take your arm."

And I said to myself, "I am very glad that he is mine, and not another woman's."

I never remember having understood hatred as I did at that moment; the possibility of his growing to love Constance had not yet occurred to me, only the thought that he might some day love another woman better than me. And it dawned upon me thus suddenly that I was jealous.

And now, what does the judge think? No evidence, of course not; they are both as true as gold, they both love me dearly, they would not dream of a flirtation, — pah! the word sickens me, it is not fit. And there am I in my folly leaving them together, whilst I give way to ugly doubts, and tear myself by an ugly passion.

I had better go down again. This doubt of them is hateful in me.

June 10th. — I must be very jealous indeed. This is very strange. I dreamed last night that we were in a room full of people, we three. I was

seeking him, and he came towards me suddenly with Constance on his arm. Lifting her on high, I threw her far from us, so that with a cry she sank into great depths; and Gabriel — seeking to stay me — caught me by the waist. I heard the whirl and the hum of those about us, but in the weakness of my love I fell with my head upon his breast, and thus we floated into endless space.

I am a sensible person as a rule, yet the flavour of this dream has been with me all day long, and I could hardly look at Constance for the wrong I had done her in my thoughts. I must be very jealous.

June 18th. — I put it from me for a while. I have been very calm; I have watched them narrowly. I am very calm now. Gabriel came to spend the evening; Uncle George had been provided for Mrs. Rayner's edification, and we all

sat together in the drawing-room. Grandmamma and Aunt Caroline had Constance between them under the lamp. I could watch her very well. Gabriel sat next me. We could not talk, so I thought we might as well play backgammon, and we set the board so that he could not see Constance.

When Gabriel left, I took him as far as the blue door, first making a round of the garden and shrubbery; it was a dear walk. He said, "Shall we make a match of it, Emilia, between your perfumed uncle and that benighted woman?" It certainly was an excellent idea. Towards the end he said:

"Emilia, you have been rather pale these last days. Take care of my girl, my dear girl. And your step is not over firm; you cling to me as you walk."

Why, yes, that was true enough; I was clinging to him with all my force.

Gabriel is older than he was; he would never have noticed this when first I knew him, not even when first he loved me. He has grown much more thoughtful of late.

All this holds together. I am perfectly calm; I am not deceiving myself. I am calm because I see the need of self-possession and reflection. Gabriel and Constance, — it seems horrible to set it down thus before my poor eyes, — they love one another.

And now let me be very careful, very just and true. They love each other, but they do not know it. I know it, because my great love has so trained my eye that they cannot deceive me; neither he nor she; themselves, perhaps, but me never.

I do not say that it is dangerous love, lasting love; these passing fancies die their own death, and therefore I think I shall not disturb them; if I part them,

the shock might awaken them to the truth. No; I will let their fancy run its own course, trusting that it may die before they become aware of its existence.

That is it; they do not know it yet, it is an unconscious attraction. He loves me so firmly, he would never dream of infidelity to me; yet, just at present, he is unfaithful in thought and does not know it. Poor dear, if he knew, how miserable he would be, how he would hate himself! And Constance, too. This is a cruel thing, but I think I can bear it; it must pass because they love me so much. It rests with me; I must be very wise. They are as sleep-walkers; I must lead them from danger, patiently, tenderly. I think I can keep calm.

June 21st. — It comes to me almost as a miracle what one can bear. It seems that a certainty, however terrible, hurts less cruelly than doubt. I suffered most

at the dawning of my fears. Now that I know the worst, I can strain my endurance to the requisite point. Besides, it cannot last. The more I think of it, the more natural it seems to me that they should thus forget themselves, for a while; have I not myself been foolish over both? The fault, too, is mine; I brought them together; they are not to blame.

Some day I shall laugh at all this; and it is really endurable, even now. The thing is to brace oneself sufficiently, to the exact point. It seems to me I keep saying the same thing over and over again; but it is so necessary to keep it in mind.

June 25th. — Gabriel is not well. I noticed it a day or two ago. This afternoon he came to fetch Constance and me for a walk; it had been so warm that we thought we would walk after tea. And

instead of walking, we stayed in the garden. Mrs. Rayner — thank mercy! — was out driving with grandmamma and Uncle George.

We stayed in the garden, and idled through the hours; we each had a book, but I doubt that we read a dozen pages between us. Nor did we talk much; every now and then we fell to talking, but the pauses had the best of it.

Gabriel looked very tired; I spread a rug out on the grass, and he fell asleep with his head on my knees. My pretty Constance said to me, "You will be tired, you have nothing to lean against," and she brought her chair up behind me so that I might lean against her. She is very sweet, my Constance. She put her head down next to mine, and we spoke in whispers, mostly of him. She has no suspicion that she loves him more than need be. But it came into my head then,

looking down at Gabriel's pale face, and remembering how he had said he could not sleep of nights, that perhaps he knows he loves her.

I must watch them more closely. To-morrow I am going to the Cottage. I fear my visits there a little. Jane is very fond of me; it is difficult to hide from her that, just at present, I am not so happy as I was. Gabriel and Constance would, of course, notice it also, but they are not quite themselves.

June 27th. — I think I feel as men must who die of thirst adrift in mid-ocean. There is nothing in creation I could not tell Gabriel and Constance between them, yet I must now bear the burden of a secret I can share with neither. Some day, of course, we shall speak of it and laugh. Perhaps not. My only fear now is that perhaps I might go mad, that perhaps I am mad, that all this is a decep-

tion, the outcome of my poor brain. I don't know what to think.

I found Gabriel on the Common just before I reached the Cottage. I thought he was writing; he was lying at full length on the heather. I stood still within a few yards of him, and presently he looked up, his dear face flushed.

"Emilia!" he cried, "I want you more than ever I did! Sit here by me."

And when I had sat down a little way from him, away from him just because I so longed to sit next, he drew himself up to me and took my glad hand.

I asked him what was amiss, saying I did not like his looks and nervous ways.

"Where are your gay spirits?" said I; "I hardly know my child, he has grown so sober."

"Yes," he replied. "I hardly know myself. I think I am not well. The poem is dead,— not a throb of the pulse. Emilia! you must cure me!"

"Dear," said I, "how shall that be?"

"Take me away! I am weary of all things. The summer is fledged; he will take wing before we realise it. You must marry me soon, very soon."

And I promised that I would, — on the 15th of July, as we presently decided.

Surely, if I were not mad, I should be very joyful. I feel no joy, only disbelief; I cannot believe, sore as I am with doubt and sorrow, that in nineteen days all will be well, and I again full mistress of that I fear to lose. Just at first, I was dizzy with joy, and thought my misgivings had been very vain and foolish; but then it occurred to me that Gabriel was perhaps impelled to this sudden decision by the dawning consciousness of his infidelity, and hoped — by marrying me at once — to check the further growth of his fancy.

If this be so, he is wise; for that it is a passing fancy I am certain. I should not marry him if I thought otherwise.

But it is very sad; I am so sorry for us all.

June 30th. — It must be late; the chimes have just told three quarters, it must be a quarter to three. I was in bed, — I am very much troubled. I think I had better write a little, lest I lose my self-possession; that would be fatal. Constance and I returned to-day from London; we had been there to get my things. I took her with me because I feared to leave her alone with Gabriel; it seemed unwise. Besides, I could not leave them; I am indeed intolerably jealous; I never leave them now for the fraction of a minute. I cannot, it is too cruel pain; and I am grown such a coward, I cannot bear it.

Yet it was foolish to take her with me; I might have foretold how it would be. I saw very soon that she pined for him, perhaps as much as I did. And I knew

that he wandered to and fro at home, meeting her thoughts with his. I brought her back as soon as I could. Gabriel met us at the station; the engine shrieked, as I did in my heart. It was a strange mingling of the Heaven of my life with the sordid greyness of the world. I saw at once that there was a change; I had parted them and taught them what each was worth to the other.

So now I know. It is well, perhaps, to have reached the end, the limit of misery, to know that, come what may, I have suffered my fill. And I was so happy. I cannot think to-night; I know not what to do; I stare at my dead joy, — it is dead and cold, nothing can wake it now. When I have stared a little longer, I must dig its grave, bury it in the bare earth, in eternal darkness.

That is all I feel, the death of my joy; I cannot yet think of them that killed it.

To-night in my despair I cannot tell whether I love or hate them; love them for what they were, or hate them for what they are.

July 2d. — The day is hot and heavy; it suits me very well. Yesterday we were nearly all day together. I remember how it was with me when my mother died; I had sooner bear it again than my pain of every day. To be with them, watching the growth of their terrible love, that is murdering me, and yet to stay on, fearing a worse agony. Their eyes shall never meet; I shall stay and watch them, if I die for it.

Only thirteen days more and he is mine, and I can bear him from her. Yesterday I thought, Shall I give him to her? But I am not generous. It may be wicked, it may be cruel, but I, too, am living. Why should I break my heart that theirs may be whole? No; he chose me for his wife,

he will not take his word from me. I know he loves her better, but he will forget that, I shall make him so happy, I shall spoil him so! Oh, yes, he will forget. For a year, perhaps, he will be unhappy; then all will be well.

It might be different if I did not know how happy I can make him.

July 3d. — Let me write it down, all my infamy. I am possessed by a new fear, — that Gabriel might prove honest. It is not true that trouble chasteneth; there is no health left in me. If I clear all the cobwebs away, I still can see the right. I can see this: that he loves her better than me, and I remember our covenant.

I know that it is my duty to go to him and lay his freedom in his hands; or, barring this, to await the truth from his own lips. Yet now, when I am alone with him, I am possessed by this terrible new fear, that he might be true to his own self

and me. For to marry one woman and love another is a shameful act indeed.

Let me look upon my love and ask myself whereof it is made. If I seek to have this man, knowing his heart to be another's, if I desire for him rather the silence of cowardice than the nobler loyalty of truth, why, then, my love is not good love. It is not love, but a most unholy passion, that places its desire above the well-being of its object. And yet I can see the right.

Oh! how empty are these dreams, and how the devil in us, the man of flesh, mocks the God-led spirit that dreamed them!

The blood of the heart is master. We shall never reach perfection.

July 4th. — They have not met to-day. I was at the Cottage, and we made merry as best we could. Gabriel laughed. But when I went into the larder to fetch the

bread for tea, I stayed and cried; for he had laughed otherwise the first day I came.

Oh, what have we done, we two! We set up Truth as our God, believing that we should right all the wrongs of the world by living clean of heart and hand and tongue. Where are we now? Falsehood lies thick upon us, blackening each word, each trifling action. Yes, I went and cried in the larder, and when I got back to the kitchen Gabriel was playing with the kittens, a very imp as of old. We laughed, both of us.

But later, when I came upon him unawares, he sat with head bowed low, and his white hands clasped on his knee. I closed the door softly and went home. It rained a little.

I knew, I know that I am cruel, yet, — only one life, — and I love him so! Only one life, and he loves her so. The road is dark; I cannot find my way.

July 6th. — I have been very sinful. I was worse yesterday, if can be, than before; more blind, unjust, and selfish. Gabriel came to supper; it had been a hot day, and in the evening we walked together, we three.

We watched the colours fade from the sky and the blue night deepen; the little stars came one by one. The wind rose, soft and cool, and there we stood, we three, under broad Heaven. I fell back a little, and they went on side by side, silent and still. Not a word, not a sign, but I knew, I, what peace was upon them, soothing the turmoil of their blood. There they stood against the sky,— how I had watched them, how I knew them,— oh, my heart, how I loved them! And it came to me suddenly how hatefully I had been loving them.

Two women passed us on the road; they spoke of their dead, and one of them said, "It is God's will."

I stood still and laughed aloud, so that my dears turned, wondering. But I have repeated it to myself ever since. The woman spoke the truth. For, God or no God, there is a Might against which we cannot stand, and woe be unto those that lift their little wills against the will of Nature. When two love, they must belong to each other; when one loves, Miserere.

I will wait a day or two, until I have learned my lesson well, until I am strong; then I will do what must be done. But I must first be strong, test my strength to the uttermost, and tell myself every day, "She will be his; she will take the joy that shone into your eyes; you will have nothing, nothing."

Then I must try to realise that thought and bear it nobly; for to make a sacrifice and bear it ill is beneath contempt.

July 9th. — How beautiful love is! Now that, one by one, I am breaking the

tendrils from the wall, and shall soon hold Love in my hand, an emblem merely, clinging to nothing, I see all that is divine in it. I myself am selfish, earth-smeared; yet by means of this talisman I am to be heroic, even I, finding joy in the gift I prepare for others through the tearing of my heart, the outpouring of my own blood. It is a blessed madness. Sober, I could not.

To-day one week remains. Gabriel said to me just now, "In a week, Emilia, we shall be gone."

"Yes, dear," said I; and I wondered at his strength, at his loyalty to me.

How comes it, I wonder, that it took me so long to find the small straight path. I must hasten now and be ready soon; he has suffered all too long. And Constance is thin, her eyes hang heavily, she helps me prepare my wedding clothes, and is gay, to hide what she cannot. She often says:

"How slow you are! Hurry up, my solemn bride, or we shall never be ready."

"Ready enough," say I.

To-day I went to Mrs. Rayner, and begged her to approach her solicitor on the question of obtaining Constance's divorce. My ignorance of these matters is absolute, yet surely this is possible. Gabriel once led me to believe she could obtain her divorce without difficulty.

"But a divorce is so scandalous," said Mrs. Rayner.

"Not so scandalous," I replied, "as what it may prevent."

I believe my words were entirely thrown away, for her blindness is phenomenal. She is, besides, much too self-absorbed at present to properly watch Constance; her horizon is obscured by Uncle George's whiskers. It gives me, even in these days, a grim satisfaction to see those two

preparing millstones for each other's necks.

I shall write to Marianna, telling her to expect me in Florence shortly. How calm I am! Have I learned my lesson so well? Or is this calm mere self-deceit? When I have truly learned the lesson, realise that what I am about to do separates me from both forever, surely I shall not be alive to go to Florence.

July 10th. — To-day Constance would not come to the Cottage with me, although Jane Norton had most particularly wished it. I think she avoids Gabriel,— it may be my fancy, or perhaps mere chance; otherwise it still seems to me that she does not know she loves him.

She came up to me in the morning, to help me pack my papers; we idled, we wandered restlessly about my disordered room. Suddenly she came to me as I leaned over my strong-box, and, clasping

me round the shoulders, laid her head down on the back of my neck.

"Dear," she said, "do you remember your birthday at Florence, when I helped you with your books?"

I stood up and took her to me.

"Yes," said I; "and I would that day were back again."

She gave a sigh, a little shiver. I felt it. But she said:

"Silly, big thing, how can you talk so? You are going to be so happy!"

"Why, yes," I replied; "that's true."

Poor little Constance! To-day I may say it, to-day she is still the poorer. Soon 'twill be poor Emilia.

July 11th. — To-day they met again. I am not schooled, I have not learned my lesson, and now I know that I shall never learn it. We were out together; again I let them walk ahead, and kept far behind them, saying to myself: "This is my life!"

But it was unendurable. I rejoined them, and slipped in between them; I cannot yet look upon them side by side, neither actually nor in my imagination.

This does not mean that I shall not abide by my decision. Only three days more; I must hasten. Yet these are the last days I have to live; mingled with my pain is the last drop of joy I may taste upon this earth. And yet, having their love, I dare not think of death.

It dawned upon me to-day that Constance knows; she is pale, and much troubled. Poor little one.

July 12th. — To-morrow it must be. I meant to tell him to-night, but I could not.

It is half-past ten. Aunt Caroline has just been to my room, bless her! I thought she was in bed.

"Have you room for this in your trunk, Milly?" she said. "I should like you to

hang it up in your room wherever you go."

It was a text she had painted for me. Written in gold among sprays of lilies-of-the-valley shone "God is Love." Poor soul! she ought to know.

Yes, to-morrow I shall tell him. I should have told him to-night. I stayed at the Cottage until late; after supper he brought me home. We were very silent. I kept on trying to begin, wondering how to say it, and he had something, no doubt, in his thoughts. I knew all the while that it was our last walk across the heath together; perhaps I wanted to keep it entirely my own. I walked a step or two behind him, so that my eyes might gaze their fill, and he did not seem to feel my watching. I wanted to print his form forever in my memory.

We were in sight of the blue gate; we had not spoken for half-a-mile, and had

fallen very far apart. I turned suddenly giddy, and spread my hands towards him, crying:

"Gabriel! Gabriel!"

He was very kind to me; he turned back and put his arm about my waist, and we went on more slowly still, as silent as before. But, all the while, something within me said: "Do you know where you are? Do you know who holds you? In a few weeks, oh! in one hour, you would sell your soul for one of these seconds."

Yet I could not feel; it seems to me now that I did not feel.

Within a few yards of the blue door we stood still. I said:

"Come no further, Gabriel."

But I held his hand to my side; I knew that I might never do so again. We stood thus a few seconds, then I turned my face up suddenly, and he kissed me on the eyes. And then he left me.

Why do I write this? It is merely as a picture before me. I feel very little now; I am so cold.

And now he walks home across the heath. Good night, Gabriel. Why did he kiss my eyes? It was better the first time.

All past, all gone, all dead. I cannot see that I need live in this graveyard.

Perhaps I too shall die; who knows?

THE POSTSCRIPT.

THE POSTSCRIPT.

THERE was a man who made unto himself wings, and thought to soar upon them; but, as he rose into high Heaven, the Sun melted the wax wherewith he had fastened the pinions on to his body, and the poor fool, sinking to earth, was drowned in deep waters.

Now, as Icarus fell into the sea, what lesson would have risen from his heart unto the sons of men?

This?

"Children of earth, the earthworm crawls in its blindness; be content, for ye are such."

Or this?

"Make wings unto yourselves and fly! My wings were strong, and should have

borne me further; I fall and die, yet I have seen the Sun."

I know not. Nor know I how to read the lesson of my own life. I, too, can only say, "My wings were strong, and should have borne me further."

I shall not burn my letters and my journal, as I meant to do. Here they lie in my lap; I meant to burn them to-night. But now, after reading them through, I think that I shall tie them together and lay them by, adding a record of that which came to pass.

When I am dead, some human being may read my words, some other pilgrim on the narrow way, seeing where I faltered and fell, may be able to step onward with the greater firmness. And yet, I doubt it; there were no need to weep over our faults, might they but save another's tears. Man learns all truth through his own pain.

I married him. It was a great sin.

It would be easier to sit in judgment on oneself, did straight and simple purpose lead to a single act. My purpose was clear enough; I meant to give him his liberty, I knew that it was my duty to do so, but the blood of the heart was master.

Had I been physically strong at the time, had not many weeks of doubt and misery affected me bodily as well as mentally, I might perhaps have had the strength to fulfil my intentions. I say perhaps; we cannot tell what might have been. And it is particularly in such cases as mine, when body and spirit are alike affected, that we are the most easily thrown out of balance by unforeseen influences, by some sudden wave of feeling, by the mood of another, by the interference of time and place.

The day after I made the last entry in

my journal, I did not see Gabriel until the evening. Constance had a headache, my poor sweet, and wished to be alone; so I, too, was alone nearly all day. And all day long I rehearsed the scene to come, gathering all my strength together, telling him in my imagination what I had to tell, in twenty different ways. When evening came, my heart was dead. I felt absolutely nothing. I remember singing as I made myself tidy for supper, and being so offended with myself for doing so that I left off, in order to simulate, at least, a depression I no longer felt.

Gabriel supped with us, and we were exceedingly merry; not that I was necessarily merry, not being sad,— indeed, I was neither the one nor the other, but my heart was dead, and I let my body do as it would. I remember looking hard at Gabriel once, and saying to myself, "After all, he will admire me for this much more

than I deserve; after all, I do not love him so much as I imagined."

After supper I played some while on the piano. Gabriel and Constance sat very far apart, but I should not have felt it had they sat together. At ten o'clock I left off.

"Gabriel," said I, "I shall turn you out a little earlier than usual to-night, because I want to walk as far as the park with you."

Then, for a second, feeling returned to me; there came a little flutter of fear within me, the same I sometimes felt in childhood when I had told a lie and, wanting to confess it, stood at my mother's door saying, "May I come in?"

There was no moon, but the sky was not dark. We walked through the garden in silence; once or twice I contrived to force up to my lips, by great effort, the words I meant to speak; but then my

heart beat so fearfully that I felt my courage fail me, and I said to myself, time after time, "Presently will do." It was not active love for Gabriel that checked me, merely the actual physical fear that I suppose most people experience when about to give forth words of great import.

But just as we reached the shrubbery, I said:

"Gabriel, I have something to tell you."

"And so have I," said he, "something to tell you. But you first."

"No," I replied; "you first."

It was for one moment a great relief to think that he was about to save me from the trial I dreaded.

We took a few more steps in silence; I was looking down, not at him. I felt my heart beat more than ever, fear was still there, but of a different kind; I awaited

his words as one might await a death-blow. But they did not come. Suddenly he halted, and I, too.

"Well?" said I, and I lifted my head.

There he stood, smiling at me.

"Do you remember 'Peer Gynt'?" asked he. "That was the bush."

I looked at the laurel, and then at him again.

"Why, yes," said I; "that was the bush."

His dear eyes were gazing into mine; I could not look away again. There came a tremor over all my body; my love for him swept over me in throbbing waves of pain; I fell towards him, stifling a cry against his breast. And he, wrapping his arms about me, strained me to him with great force.

"Emilia!" he cried, "I love you very much; I have never told you how much I love you!"

I knew it to be the last cry of his conscience, but, as I lay there listening to the beat of his heart, there fled from me what little yet remained of my conquered spirit's strength and noble purpose. Only the woman in me cried aloud, "I cannot!"

I tried to speak, but the words came almost as a sob. Quickly I threw my arms about his neck and, bending his face towards me, kissed him of my own accord as he smiled; then, breaking from him, would have run homewards.

But he held me by the hand.

"When shall I come to-morrow?" asked he, hoarsely.

"Not at all," said I. "Go, Gabriel! God help me; I love you too much!"

And so we did not meet next day, and the next we were married.

For many months I made believe that

we were happy. Ah! it was not all make-belief! I have had great joys.

Never was the game of happiness easier to play at than it was for Gabriel and me in the first year of our marriage. He was very much attached to me, and I loved him.

It was the first time he had been out of England; the sights he saw filled him with rapture and insatiable curiosity, to appease which I led him from place to place until I had shown him all I knew, and still we went onwards, covering new ground together.

We never stayed very long in the same spot; a certain weariness crept over me at times, but I saw that it was best for him to keep continually on the wing; and indeed, having no desire on earth but his happiness, I was ready, for his sake, to wander my whole life away. Moreover, as he was not working at all

the while, I looked forward to a day when inspiration might set in, together with satiety, when he too might yearn, as I did, to sit in peace beside a hearth of his own.

Constance wrote to us occasionally, and I to her. Her letters to me were the same as of old, full of love and sweetness; she nearly always mentioned Gabriel, but not in such a way as to denote preoccupation. My letters to her were not as they had been; I felt this at the time. On re-reading them just now I burned them all, — there was no breath in them.

Mrs. Rayner had taken Fairview, the nearest house to Fletcher's Hall, soon after my marriage, and set her cap at Uncle George with so much persistence that he engaged himself to her the following summer. So my sweet girl stayed on at Graysmill. Grandmamma's letters, and Aunt Caroline's, were always full of

her, of the comfort her sunny presence brought them; my father-in-law and Jane had the same tale to tell.

For many months I never even contemplated the possibility of returning to England with my husband. There is no knowing how long our wanderings might have been, but for my illness. Gabriel and I were passing through Pisa at the end of June, on our way to Lerici, whither we were bent on pilgrimage, when I fell ill.

That was the end of many dreams. The wheel could turn no more; the swift and restless life of day to day, that fled the past and hung back from the morrow, was checked abruptly, completely.

But, lying in that little bed of painted wood, staring at the net curtains and green shutters, at the lozenge pattern on the wall, at the cornucopiæ on the ceiling, a clear and sober sight returned to

me. The body having failed, the spirit found its strength.

Our sudden halt had worked swiftly on Gabriel also. He set to work; the restlessness died out of him, but, alas! the lightness, too. He became very still, silent and self-absorbed. In the cool of evening, the time of day when I was strongest, I used to turn my kind little nun out of the room, and then Gabriel came and read to me.

At first he had tried to finish the long poem begun in the days of our betrothal, but he soon laid that aside, and another sprang forward with extraordinary rapidity. Perhaps he himself was hardly aware of the sorrow of that poem; perhaps he thought I would judge it so entirely as a work of art that I should not take note of its deep gloom, of its hopeless melancholy. But nothing was lost upon me now. I read it in every line, — he suffered;

something failed him,— perhaps he knew not what, perhaps he knew. A terrible loneliness was in his heart,— and I had given him all I had to give.

On the fifteenth of July, I awoke with a sense of something fresh and sweet; a bunch of roses lay upon my pillow, and Gabriel stood beside my bed. The shutters were still closed.

"What?" said I, "have you been out already? How dear of you this is! Is the sun shining?"

And he answered:

"Of course, what should it do but shine on our wedding-day?"

Then he sat down on the edge of the bed, and took both my hands in his.

"Emilia," said he, "you have made me very happy."

But I, sitting up, bent my head low over his hands and kissed them; my loose hair fell forward, he did not see the tears

that stood in my eyes. I knew that he had lied.

From that day I began to think with a purpose. I had already gained sufficient mastery over myself, sufficient calm and strength of spirit to be able to do so.

I can hardly call it a struggle that followed. I copied out and laid under my pillow the words of the covenant we had made the day after our betrothal; daily I read it through, and recognised how we had failed towards each other, and towards our best beliefs.

We had both failed; but, whereas he had erred merely, I knew that I had sinned; in the fulness of my remorse, my only thought was now to offer reparation. Nor was it only for Gabriel's sake that I was now possessed by the desire of atonement. In the blindness of human passion, I had sinned against my better self, my noblest purposes, my most firm

and high beliefs; that passion conquered, I determined to make amends for my great transgression by following, regardless of pain and danger, the highest path that lay within the range of my vision, regardless of pain to myself, regardless of that fear of the world which so often leads us to accept its canons, even in sight of a nobler righteousness.

Therefore I resolved to set him free; I believed this to be possible, although my sight was clear, my spirit calm. But he who beholds only the aerial pathway of an ideal right may stumble and fall on the stones of the world. It was only given me later to realise, through grief too terrible for words, that, given the world as the world is, there are wrongs that are irrevocable, lies that, once lied, no truth can ever wipe away.

Meanwhile, health returned to me.

We stayed at Pisa until I was convalescent, then moved to the sea. His poem and my thoughts occupied us severally; they were good and peaceful days. Now and again the heart rebelled against the severity of the spirit, but, take it all in all, a great calm was upon me.

One evening in September, Gabriel and I were leaning out of my window; it was almost dark; the occasional footfall of a passenger fell on the stones of our quiet street; some men were singing in the trattoria round the corner; we two leant there in silence, counting the stars as they came.

"Gabriel," said I, "I have had a letter from Constance. I am afraid she is not very happy at Graysmill; her mother worries her; she sounds lonely and not over well. Shall we go home a while?"

Gabriel shifted his feet, and turned the latch of the shutter round and round.

"No," he replied; "I think not; I mean, if you feel you want to see Constance, go, Emilia, only don't leave me too long. I had rather stay here. I have been thinking it over of late, and I see no reason why I should ever return to England."

"But, dearest one," said I, "your father!"

"I have thought of that. I long to see him, and Jane, too. You go home, Emilia, and bring them back with you. We four can live out here in Italy forever, live and die here."

"But Constance?" said I, then.

There was a long silence. The latch of the shutter whirled round and round.

"Oh, Constance," said he; "yes, it's hard on Constance. She will have to live with her mother and your step-uncle, I suppose."

"No," I replied; "I should never allow

that. But we can arrange about Constance when we see her; we can talk it over together. I cannot go without you, Gabriel. There is no reason why we should stay there long, — only come with me you must."

He held out for some days, but in the end I conquered. We passed through Florence on the way, and there beside my mother's grave I put forth the first, the only prayer I ever made,— a wordless yearning towards the Inconceivable, a prayer for strength and the Light of Truth.

We reached Graysmill on the nineteenth of September. My impatience was so great that, in spite of Gabriel's displeasure at what he called my rashness, I would not stay in London on the way, but we travelled straight down, reaching Fletcher's Hall at midnight.

Aunt Caroline was down to receive us,

for I had sent a telegram from Dover; upstairs, my dear old woman was sitting up in bed with sweet, wrinkled smiles beneath her frilled night-cap. I was very glad to be home again; my heart felt warm.

I sent Aunt Caroline to bed, much against her will, and then Gabriel and I sat down to drink the tea he had wished for, beside the fire in the breakfast-room. Gabriel was very white, his eyes shone all too brightly; again and again I saw him put his hand to his brow, a trick he had when he was nervous.

"Dear," said I, "don't drink so much tea; it's very bad for you, you will never sleep to-night."

"No," said he; "I am sure I couldn't sleep anyway. I think I shan't stay here, Emilia, if you don't mind. I feel very impatient to see my father; the night is fine, I shall walk over to the Cottage, and take him by surprise."

I was just looking at him, wondering how to meet this mood, when there came a light tap at the window, a French window that opened on to the lawn.

"Hark!" said I.

We listened; again it came, again; and then a little voice calling, "Emilia! Emilia!"

"It is Constance!" I cried, and, springing to my feet, I flung open curtain and shutter and window.

There she stood in the dark, with the light of the room upon her. She was in black, with a dark shawl wrapped round her head; I could see nothing clearly save the white, outstretched hands, the pale sweet face, with its halo of burnished curls.

She sprang towards me with a little sob, and we laughed and cried together as I clasped her to me, covering her beloved face with kisses. I was still holding her

fast when she perceived Gabriel; from the stronghold of my arms, with her head still resting on my bosom, she turned towards him and held out her hand. I looked neither at him nor at her, but, bending away, laid my cheek upon her curls.

And it was thus they met again.

Of the days that immediately followed, there is not much to tell. Any doubt I might have entertained as to the continuance of their mutual passion vanished swiftly and entirely. The path of duty lay very clear before me.

I saw more of Constance than of Gabriel in those days; we were almost always together, and he avoided us. Richard Norton, who had greatly aged in the year of our absence, was so happy in his son that Gabriel had every excuse for spending the greater part of his time at the Cottage. Indeed, he usually left me

directly after breakfast, and did not return until supper-time.

He wrote a great deal, out in the woods and in his old room. The poem was approaching completion, and this, in fact, was the reason why for fifteen days I deferred the execution of my purpose.

The sufferings we all three experienced daily at this time, when it was impossible to entirely avoid each other's presence, were endurable to me, and I sought to help Constance to bear them. To him they were, so to speak, a source of inspiration; and I therefore determined to let things run their course until the last line should be written.

On the fourth of October, — it was Saturday, — I, having a headache, did not get up to breakfast, and Gabriel left before nine o'clock for the Thatched Cottage. My sweet Constance spent the entire morning with me. She had brought a

hat to trim, but the work did not proceed. It was a black felt hat, I remember, and I trimmed it for her. She herself was in one of her childlike moods, winsome and gay atop of the sorrow that had made her pale cheek paler, and set blue rings about her dear eyes.

I was alone all the afternoon, and copied out for the last time a letter to my husband, on which I had lately expended many hours. I felt strong and sure of myself; it was not cowardice that led me to write to him instead of saying to his face all that I had to say. But there was no telling in what mood I should find him, were I to speak. He might refuse to listen; he might move me to momentary indecision by manner, look, or words; I preferred to write it all down clearly, to make sure that what I had to say would not run the risk of being left unsaid through the interposition of unforeseen and incalculable emotions.

At the approach of supper-time, I dressed and went into the drawing-room. We were expecting Constance and Mrs. Rayner, the vicar, and Uncle George. My old dears and I had half an hour to ourselves before any of them came. Gabriel was very late; our last guest had already arrived when I heard him come in and rush up to our room.

When he came down, he was pale in the extreme, and his eyes danced in his head. I went up to him and drew him aside, towards the window.

"Well?" said I, softly, "what's the matter with him?"

He flushed and took my hands, pressing them nervously.

"Finished!" he whispered. "I have done, Emilia,—the last line is written."

I looked up at him with gladness in my face.

"You must read it me this evening," said I.

There came a flash of light before my inward eye, — the joy of his achievement, — then it fell in broken showers, all fell. I had a sense as of sinking into space, and all was dark within me.

"Go and give your arm to Aunt Caroline," said I, pressing his hand as I let it go.

I myself went into supper with the vicar. We did not sit long at table. Uncle George, Mrs. Rayner, and Mr. Dobb sat down immediately after to a rubber of whist with Aunt Caroline; grandmamma fell asleep. I turned the lamp-shade towards her face, and my pretty Constance covered her well with a shawl; then, taking my dear one by the waist, I walked with her to where Gabriel stood at the chimney.

"I have had an inspiration," said I. "Come, we will slip away to Fairview and spend the evening alone, we three; then

Gabriel can read us the last canto,— will you?"

I had already read the first part of the poem to Constance, with his permission.

Neither of them uttered a word.

"Come," said I; "Constance and I will set off at once, our things are in the hall. Run up and fetch your manuscript, Gabriel."

I put my foot through the flounce of my petticoat on the way, so Constance took me up to her room for a needle and cotton. When we came down again, Gabriel was in the morning-room; he had drawn up the blind and was watching the moon.

"I call this very nice," said I. "Our party is the better of the two."

Constance lighted the lamp, and we sat down, all three, at the table, — Gabriel with his back to the window, Constance

opposite him, and I between them, to the right of the table.

Then he began to read.

How it went with them I know not, but I was soon entirely lost in what I heard. With my head upon my arm I listened, the visions that he conjured filled my eyes, the music of his words engrossed my ears; more beautiful in form and purpose than anything he yet had written, this last canto filled me with joy and pride.

When the last words fell, I did not raise my head from the table. Heaven knows why, but I did not want to let them see, not even them, that the tears were gushing from my eyes.

I heard Gabriel collect his papers and put them into his pocket; still none of us spoke. It seemed time to break the silence. I lifted my head and looked up at my poet.

There he sat with head thrown back and quivering lips; his eyes, wide with mingled fear and yearning, were fixed upon Constance, whose white, uplifted face was as the mirror of his own. It was for an instant only; the next, they turned to me.

And so the tale was told; we sat there, we three, blenched and panic-stricken, gazing into each other's eyes.

The time had come. I rose, took their hands, and laid them together on the table. I would have said something, but no words came; so, smiling simply into the face of each, I bent and kissed the intertwining fingers, then left the room. I groped my way into the garden, and, standing on a flower-bed beneath the window, looked in upon them. They sat as I had left them, with clasped hands and mingled gaze. I think it was Constance that moved first, I am not sure,

but they rose suddenly and fell into each other's arms. For an instant I looked upon them with a strange sense of exultation, as if, perhaps, I were the Spirit of Love, and not a jealous woman. But when he turned back her white face with his hand and bent over her, all the woman in me returned. I saw her little hands clutch him convulsively, she gave a low cry, — and then I slipped from the window on to the ground.

How long I crouched there I cannot tell; I felt as one must feel that has been buried for dead and awakes in the grave. There was mignonette beside me, and a clump of southern wood. It was the sound of some one bounding down the steps that roused me. Gabriel had left her. I got up and shook my clothes, walking to and fro on the lawn. When at length I thought of going home, I remembered that I had left my things in

Constance's room, and that it might seem strange in me to arrive at the house bareheaded. So I went upstairs. The passage was not quite dark; I could just see that Constance lay outside her bedroom door. I stooped and tried to raise her, but she flung herself to my knees, crying:

"Emilia! — O my God!"

"Hush!" said I; "come into the room. Hush! the servants might hear you."

So I drew her in and would have laid her on her bed; but again she fell down and clasped my knees.

"Dear!" she cried; "dear, you loved me so, and this is what I have done. Oh, Emilia, forgive me! — Emilia, forgive me, oh, forgive me!"

I told her that she was forgiven. I cooled her forehead with water, and at length laid her upon the bed. She clung to me piteously as I was leaving.

"Kiss me good night," she murmured.

I had not felt that I could kiss her, but I stooped and touched her slightly on the brow, at the root of the curls. Then I left her, feeling all the way the clutch of her little fingers on my arm.

As I slipped up to my room, I had to pass the drawing-room door; it was ajar, and I caught a glimpse of them all as they sat at the card-table under the green-shaded lamp.

"Honours divided, Miss Seymour, honours divided," said the vicar; and as I slowly made my way upstairs I heard the clatter of teacups and Mrs.-Rayner's thin laugh.

I went past the room I had shared with Gabriel, and made my way to the topmost floor, to the room that was formerly mine. It was in disorder, and nearly bare. I lighted a candle, but the sight of the dreariness oppressed me; I therefore

blew it out again, and leant out of the open window.

It was a cool night, and dark, for clouds had hidden the moon; the chimes rang the quarters; they seemed to follow close upon each other, and still I stood at the window. I heard Mrs. Rayner go, and her escort, Uncle George, return. "B-rrr," he went, as he stamped up the steps. "How his keys jingle," thought I; "and is it so cold?"

I cannot remember that I thought much of what had happened; my senses were very keen, but emotion was torpid. I took note of every barking dog, every distant wheel; sometimes I sang a little to myself, and, all the while, I worked my foot to and fro along the skirting.

Presently Uncle George left for good, taking the vicar with him. The servants came to bed, giggling under their breath; then all was still.

I did not leave the window, but in the silence — there being now no sound to arrest my attention, save the chimes which I forgot to hear — a change came over me. I fell into a sort of dream; scene after scene the past rose before me in bright visions; then came the present, chaos. I stood, as it were, in the centre of nothingness, alone and lost, not a sound, not a light, not a finger to touch.

"What matter," thought I, — "what matter if I live or die? Surely it is in this state that people kill themselves."

I heard the chimes again, and a duck quacked in the pond; it was as the laugh of a devil.

I turned from the window and stumbled over something; I lighted a candle, and sat shivering on the shrouded bed.

"Two o'clock," thought I; "it is very cold. What shall I do? Shall I sleep or die?"

And, as it were with a flash, there came to me the thought that perhaps I was not the only one who sat at this moment coldly contemplating death. An awful fear seized me that perhaps he, Gabriel, might be driven to the haven of despairers.

I threw on my cloak, and, carrying my shoes, slowly and breathlessly crept down the stairs to the back door, which had a light fastening. And I ran across garden and park, across Graysmill Heath in the night, strengthened by one fear against all others, nor did I stop until I stood on the little hillock within sight of the Thatched Cottage.

I saw at once that a light was burning in the window of Gabriel's old room. I sprang on and halted once more on the grass-patch before the Cottage door. The blind was down, a shadow passed to and fro. I could see very well by the way he

moved that he was not calm. I wanted to get to him. I tried the house door, but it was firmly fastened. I sat down on the ground and kept my eyes fixed on the window. He stooped repeatedly; once, as he swept the hair back from his eyes, I thought I saw that he held something in his hand. I picked up a stone, ready to throw it at the window, but my courage failed me; then I noticed that the light flickered strangely, as from fire; it faded, and all was dark.

I strained my ears in vain for a sound; a horrible fear seized me. I flung my little stone, but it was very dark; I heard it strike the bricks. Groping for more, I flung another, and yet another. One of them struck the panes; I stood and held my breath, — no sound.

I made my way to the door again, tried it again; I laid my ear to the key-hole, and then I distinctly heard the creaking

of the stairs; some one was coming down. The hall was crossed, the bolt of the door was gently drawn. I fell back a little; some one came out with a firm step, and sprang on to the path.

It was a mere shadow that I could see; I caught him by the arm.

"Gabriel," I said, "where are you going?"

He started violently, and something fell from his hand.

"You?" he cried. "Why are you here? Emilia! you have come too soon!"

I remember that I clutched his wrists, as if in fear that he might even then lift his hand against himself.

"You coward!" was all I said; "oh, you coward!" He did not answer me, and we stood so a while. Then he said gently:

"Your hands are cold, my girl; let us go in."

We made our way into the study. After some groping, we found the matches and lighted a candle. Gabriel sat down by the table and buried his face in his hands. I went to him and stroked his hair.

"Poor boy," I said; "I guessed how it would be; that's why I came."

He stood up hastily.

"Don't touch me!" he cried; "I have done you a fearful wrong; there was only one atonement I could make, and that you have prevented. Emilia, leave me. You should not have come."

I forget how I told him; but I told him then how, in joining their hands together, I had meant them to understand that I resigned him to her. I told him how long I had known of their most natural love, confessed my struggles, my defeat, and acknowledged to the full the sin I had committed in marrying him in spite of what I knew. I reminded him, too,

of our covenant, of the beliefs and aspirations we had shared, and implored him to accept his liberty.

"I know little of the laws," said I, "but if they refuse to part us, why, we must part ourselves. If human justice is so far removed from righteousness, why, we must rise above it, and never mind the world. 'Tis a wide place. Take her and make her happy where none knows. The worst of my pain is past."

But Gabriel still insisted on the necessity of his death. "Your dreams are wild!" he cried. "There's but one way. I have robbed you of all you had, of husband and friend. If I die, you, at least, have reparation. I have thought it well over; I am as calm as you. My poems lie in ashes in the grate. My life is done."

We talked very long, very quietly, until the dawn peeped through the cracks of

the shutters. And at last he gave me his word that he would live.

Having this promise, I rose.

"It is morning," said I; "we are not fit to talk further. To-morrow we must seek our way. Go, Gabriel, and try to sleep; I will go upstairs to Jane."

As we crossed the hall, he ran out into the garden, and I followed him. It was very cold, and I shivered, chilled by the dawn of a hopeless day.

He stooped on the path before me, and picked up the revolver he had dropped, looking at me with a queer smile. But the thought that he might even then be lying lifeless was brought to my mind with sickening vividness. I reeled, and would have fallen, had he not caught me in his arms.

"I am a fool," said I; "I saw you dead among the leaves."

He took my hands and kissed them, murmuring:

"Emilia — dear Emilia!" And then I made my way up the creaking stairs, and roused poor Jane, who lay asleep with her head under the bed-clothes. I told her there had been some trouble she should know of to-morrow, and, being half asleep, she did not question me, but made room for me in her bed.

I must have fallen asleep towards rising-time, for I did not hear her get up; but when she was nearly dressed I awoke and got up also, begging her to excuse my explanations yet a little, as I was very tired.

Gabriel got down at the same time as I did. Richard Norton was always a lie-a-bed, so poor Jane was alone to puzzle out the secret of our haggard faces. It was not early; it must have been nearly ten o'clock when Aunt Caroline arrived. The poor thing burst into tears when she saw me.

"Thank Mercy!" she cried; "oh, what a fright we've had! Why must you go out so early in the morning, before the house is up, and no message, too."

I made some little joke to laugh it off; Gabriel laughed also; we offered her some breakfast, and it was then that she said:

"I must go back at once; I promised Mrs. Rayner to bring back Constance immediately."

Gabriel and I were standing side by side; we looked at each other, and he must have read the same sudden fear in my eye that I read in his.

"Come," said I.

We left Aunt Caroline at the Cottage, and drove together in all haste, and in perfect silence, to Fairview.

Mrs. Rayner was at breakfast when we entered the dining-room; I can see her still, with her egg-spoon in her hand.

"You are fine people!" she said, "but

please remember another time that Constance is not such a horse as you are, and can't stand exercise on an empty stomach."

I stared stupidly, and then I said, but my voice was so low that I scarcely heard it:

"We have not seen Constance this morning."

Mrs. Rayner gave a shrill scream.

"My child!" she cried, "where is my child!" and ran from the room. Gabriel and I stood motionless where she had left us, and clasped our cold hands.

"Emilia Fletcher!" called Mrs. Rayner from upstairs, with a hard ring in her voice, "come up; I want you a minute."

And I went up. The bed was tumbled, but she had not slept in it; her hat and cloak were gone. I sat on the edge of the bed and shook from head to foot; Mrs. Rayner was running to and fro like a mad woman.

"She is gone! Where is she gone? I never said good night to her!" she shrieked. "Mrs. Norton, you saw her last, you must know something of it. Here are her boots, she must have gone out in her shoes; the soles were thin, she'll catch her death of cold!" And she ran to the door, crying, "Constance! Constance!"

I made my way to the dressing-table; I remembered to have seen her purse upon it when I went up to mend my dress the evening before. It was gone, but in its place I found a little note with my name upon it.

I ran with it to Gabriel; I could not read it alone. "A letter," was all I said, and we read it in the bay-window, standing side by side.

"Emilia, dearest, you have given me so much, and now I have sinned against

you. You forgave me with your lips just now; forgive me with your heart when I am dead. You must not blame me for what I do, you know I was always very weak; I cannot look you in the eyes again, nor him. God will forgive me, I think. Good-bye. Be happy,— neither you nor he must grieve for me; it is a poor little life that I throw away, and all the good I ever knew came from you or him. Be happy — Emilia, my old Emilia, good-bye."

She was found towards evening, many miles from Miltonhoe, on the banks of the Avon. Gabriel and I had been up and down the land all day, following her traces.

When we heard that she was found, we parted.

THE END.

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